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THE

MONARCH OF MINCING-LANE.

LONDON:
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THE

MONARCH OF MINCING-LANE

A Novel.

BY

WILLIAM BLACK,

AUTHOR OF 'KILMENY,' 'IN SILK ATTIRE,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 18 CATHERINE ST., STRAND.

1871.

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250. g. 36.

O that 'twere possible,
After long grief and pain,
To find the arms of my true love
Round me once again!

CONTENTS OF VOL. III.

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	THE SICK BEAR	1
II.	THE MARTENS' NEST	27
III.	COMING TO TERMS	52
IV.	DREAMS AND VISIONS	74
V.	CECIL'S FAREWELL	87
VI.	'FRA DIAVOLO'	115
VII.	OVER TOR BAY	129
VIII.	SOONER OR LATER	146
IX.	ABOUT A PORTRAIT	172
X.	TOWARDS A COLLAPSE	196
XI.	WESTWARD, HO!	206
XII.	THE WASHOOTA CONVENTION	218
XIII.	THE AVENGER AT LAST	241
XIV.	'AFTER LONG GRIEF AND PAIN'	269

THE

MONARCH OF MINCING-LANE

CHAPTER I.

THE SICK BEAR.

Crisp and clear was the weather that now shone over Surrey and over Thurston-place, where Mr. Drem lay very ill. It was Christmas time; and not for years had we had such appropriate Christmas weather. The windows of Thurston-place had all their blinds down; and the sunlight could only struggle in parallel lines through the crimson curtains as it entered the dusky, thick-carpeted rooms; but outside there was the sparkling whiteness of snow, and overhead the clear blue of a bright sky. Snow on the lawn, which was marked by the inter-

lacing foot-marks of partridges that had been running about during the early morning—snow on the heavy laurels and evergreens surrounding the house—snow on the black branches of the lime-tree walk skirting the garden—and snow on the thick squat oaks in the park that sloped down into the valley. Thurston-place was a big white house built on the face of a hill, with a semicircle of firwood behind it to shelter it from the north-east winds. It looked towards the south; and on a clear and sunny day like this you could see far over the glittering white plain—marked by black lines of hedge and coppice—towards the blue line of the chalk hills that lay down near the sea.

Richard Drem had suffered a severe shock of apoplexy; and the three doctors who attended him began to fear at one time that he might not, by Heaven's mercy, be spared to lengthen their bills. However, he so far recovered as to become the terror of them and of his wife; until, in the end, they would not enter his room except on

urgent need. They prescribed to Mrs. Drem; they studied what she told them of the case; they ordered her instead of admonishing him; and so constituted the timid little woman a sort of go-between. The office was neither pleasant nor easy; yet she undertook it so willingly — she worked with such solicitude to prevent her husband killing himself with brown sherry —that you would almost have imagined that this amiable creature, after all she had suffered, was actually anxious that her husband should live.

Richard Drem lay and alternately broke into fits of passionate defiance of the doctors' directions, and into pitiable anticipations of his doom in the next world. In his abject terror he would call for his wife to read the Bible to him, and beg for some assurance that he was likely to live; and then he would stormily demand whether he were not master in his own house, and went on having some more wine.

'I'll play you a pretty trick, my lady,' he said, with a malicious look, 'when I get

better. We shall see then who has the keys of the wine-cellar.'

'It's only for your good, Richard,' she said.

'Don't Richard me!' he cried—at imminent risk of having another apoplectic stroke. 'My first wife used no such vulgar familiarity. But she was a lady born and bred.'

'You might let your first wife rest in her grave,' said Mrs. Drem, with just a touch of bitterness. 'I daresay she was glad enough to get there.'

'She was a lady,' said Mr. Drem hotly. 'She had the manners of a lady—she had a civil tongue in her head—'

'It is a pity the rest of the house did not learn something from her,' said Mrs. Drem very quietly, but with a tendency to compression of the lips.

'Yes,' he said, 'show your spite, because she was not a nobody like you. She had the best blood in Spain in her veins—the best blood in Spain. If *she* had been by my deathbed—it may be my deathbed for

all you think, do you hear?—she would have treated me with some affection. But no matter. If I must die, I will go to her —do you hear?—I will go to her—'

'She's welcome to you,' said Mrs. Drem, with a curl of her lip.

'And when you come, where will *you* be? You'll rather be out in the cold, won't you?' he said, with a malicious laugh.

'Perhaps that is where you'd like to be then,' she said sharply.

But the next moment she was sorry she had been goaded into hinting anything about such a subject; for her husband sank into one of his fits of despondency and terror, and began to whine about his penitence and what he would do if he were spared.

'It isn't my fault that Philip will stay away like this,' he said, 'when there is no need for it, now the girl is married—'

'Who told you the girl was married?' said Mrs. Drem suddenly.

'None of your business,' said he. 'I will give him anything he wants if he will

only come back to the house. I will give him 3000*l.* a year. I will make Sir James give him Violet for a wife—and what better wife could he get?'

'But you know,' said Mrs. Drem, 'that you will only make matters worse if you try to force such a marriage. Young people nowadays are not bought and sold—'

'As they once were, do you mean to say?' he put in with a sneer. 'Well, I didn't pay much for *you*.'

'How did your first wife bear those insults?' said Mrs. Drem calmly. 'Had she something of Philip's nature in her?'

'She had the nature of a lady, not of a nobody!' said Richard Drem. 'And I tell you, madam, when I see her in heaven—'

'You make very certain of going there,' said Mrs. Drem, knowing well how to puncture the wind-bag of his boasting.

Here Mr. Drem had another fit of apprehension and penitence. Indeed, his swaying between these moods of self-assertion and abject cowardice resembled much a similar alternation between prayer and

brandy on the part of a great person of these realms, who was once about to bombard a sea-port. He now took Mrs. Drem into his confidence, and said he could not rest for thinking of what his son Philip might be doing.

'If I am going to die,' he remarked, with some pathos in his voice,—'if I am going to die, it is the place of my son to come and smooth his father's pillow. Go and tell him that—tell him to come at once, if he would see me alive.'

Mrs. Drem knew very well that there was now not the least fear of her husband's dying, if he would only avoid brown sherry. But it seemed to her that here was a favourable opportunity for inducing Philip to return to the house. It was a project she had been puzzling over for a long time; and, if the truth must be told, there had been a time in which she speculated as to all she should do for Philip, in the event of his father dying and disinheriting him by will. It was a proof of the amicable relations existing between husband and wife, that she

had not the faintest notion as to what was the purport of Mr. Drem's will—as to whether he had fulfilled his threat of cutting out Philip altogether from the document. Should that be the case, she speculated at such moments, what delight it would give her to hand over to him all that should have belonged to him! She had plenty of poor relations. She was young enough to marry again; and the greater her fortune, the greater choice of suitors she would have. On the other hand, this Philip was the son of that woman whose manners and birth and beauty had been used to irritate her for years. Yet Mrs. Drem would have given up half her fortune to Philip with the greatest joy in the world, and would have given him with it her little finger, if he had asked her to cut it off.

Here, then, was a chance of promoting that reconciliation between father and son which she had for long set her heart upon. She dared not of herself have suggested such a scheme. If she had managed to inveigle Philip to the house on the pretence

that his father was seriously ill, Richard Drem, out of pure contrariety, would have been sure to have spurned the offer of reconciliation, and sworn that he never was better in his life. But now he was in the humour. She knew that if Philip were to come now, his father would make-believe that he was on the verge of the next world, in order to move his sympathy and remorse.

'And to-morrow is Christmas-day,' said Mrs. Drem. 'How pleasant it would be if Philip were to come down and meet Sir James and Violet, who promised, as I could not go to them, to come here!'

'And have their orgies in a dying man's house!' grumbled Richard Drem. 'Say it was out of kindness to you, when you know they only want to guzzle at my expense. You think of nothing but eating and drinking, the whole lot of you. Give me another glass of sherry.'

'I daren't,' remonstrated Mrs. Drem.

'You shall, though!'

'Really, Richard, you must not have any more wine just now.'

'I will rise and throw you out of the window if I have not some more wine instantly!' he cried; and with that his face became suffused with blood, and he sank back on his pillow, breathing heavily.

Mrs. Drem ran forward.

'You are killing me,' he continued in a weak voice,—'killing me to get my money. Never mind; I am going to a better world. Send for Philip — send for my son. Go yourself and bring him; nobody can tell lies like you.'

'I should be afraid to leave you,' she said with some hesitation.

'Afraid to leave the devil!' he retorted. 'I daresay you'll be precious glad to get out for a holiday. Go away at once, I tell you, and bring him back. Promise him anything. Take a blank cheque with you, and I will sign it. No, I won't; I'm not such a fool. You can tell him he'll have one when he comes down — a blank cheque, without a signature.'

Richard Drem chuckled to himself over this excellent joke.

'Do you know where to find him?' he continued. 'Go to the rooms that that Society meets in, and you'll get him there. You'll find him, I daresay, trying, with the rest of them, to get capital punishment abolished. Why, Mrs. Drem; why? Because they're all interested in having no more hanging to look forward to! — it's their own neck makes them anxious!'

He chuckled again; and Mrs. Drem took advantage of his good humour to slip out of the room, sending Mrs. Roberts, the housekeeper, to officiate as nurse. Mrs. Roberts was a tall thin woman, with a sharp tongue; and Richard Drem was rather afraid of her. It would have been better for the whole of them if Mrs. Roberts had always command of the sick-room, instead of the pliant timid little wife.

Fearful that his humour might change, Mrs. Drem hurried on the preparations for her departure. In a very short time the carriage was at the door, and, before any counter-command had reached her, she had started for the small rural station. There

were no express-trains from this little place; but it was still early in the forenoon, and she hoped she would be in London soon enough to catch Philip.

It was the first time she had been out of the house for weeks; and there was something fresh and invigorating in the keen air, and the sunlight, and the change from the dull monotony of the sick-room. The carriage did not go rapidly along the narrow lanes, in which the snow lay thick; but there was plenty of motion and variety abroad in the blowing of the frosty wind, the glittering of the sun on the white arms of the trees, and the startled scream and rapid flight of the blackbirds as they dipped down from the holly trees to fly along for some further hiding place in the tall hedgerows. Mrs. Dreu felt quite elated and happy. She was going on an errand of charity, which should do good to everybody concerned.

'And who knows,' she said to herself, 'but that he may marry Violet after all?'

She was continually asking herself that question. It haunted her like some vague refrain, following every fresh speculation about the future. He might marry Violet after all.

At this moment Mr. Philip was putting a few things into his small portmanteau, preparatory to going down to Wimbledon to spend Christmas with an old gentleman, who was a member of the Analytical Society. This Mr. St. John was a rich old bachelor, who had but few friends, and who was glad to have an occasional visit from the Society's secretary. He was an amiable, benevolent, cheerful old man, with long white hair, very bright blue eyes, and the most astonishing ignorance of the world around him. He was a skilled entomologist, and was familiar with beetles, domestic and foreign; but he had a number of theories about his fellow-creatures which showed that he had yet a good deal to learn from the Analytical Society. It was he who proposed, when the Contagious Diseases Act was first spoken of, that all persons

who might be apprehended on suspicion should be allowed to go free on giving their word of honour that the provisions of that measure did not apply to them.

Philip was just about to start for Wimbledon when Mrs. Drem, having already been to the rooms of the Analytical Society and found them closed, drove up to his lodgings. She had not seen him for some time; and now he seemed to her to have grown somewhat paler, and there was a sort of listless indifference in his voice and manner.

'You must come down with me to Thurston,' she said. 'Your father has sent for you.'

'He is very kind,' said Philip carelessly. 'I am engaged to go to Wimbledon.'

'But your father is very ill,' said Mrs. Drem.

'Seriously ill?'

'Yes,' said Mrs. Drem, with just a twinge of compunction.

'Then why have you left the house at such a time?' he asked.

The question would have confused a less dexterous woman.

'O,' said Mrs. Drem at once, 'you know that in such an illness mental rest is the very first thing to be considered. Nothing would please your father, but that at any risk I should at once start for London and bring you down. And nothing could have given me greater pleasure, Philip. You will come—won't you? What is the use of your remaining apart from us when the cause of the estrangement is all over?'

'Yes; it is all over—isn't it?' he said absently. Then he added abruptly, 'Do you know that Miss Seaford is married?'

'Yes,' said Mrs. Drem timidly; 'I heard so. I am very sorry for your sake, Philip; and yet it may be better in the end. Only to think of your living in a place like this!'

She cast her eyes round the small room, with its litter of books, pipes, photographs, and what not.

'Your father is not absolutely in danger,' she said; 'but he is very, very anxious to have you back in the house. And really,

when you reflect, Philip, what is the use of living in this way? You have suffered a great disappointment; but you are young; and there is plenty of amusement for you. Your father offers you 3000*l.* a year.'

'I have been living on three pounds a week, and did not find it starvation either.'

'O, Philip!' said Mrs. Drem, 'why wouldn't you let me send you money? Three pounds a week! You *must* have starved; for I know you never could look after money.'

'On the contrary,' said Philip, 'there are six sovereigns of savings on the mantelpiece there. And there might have been eight, only somebody has taken two since last night.'

'And you have made no inquiry after the thief?'

'No,' he said indifferently. 'I suppose it was the old woman who lights the fire in the morning. If so, she is welcome to them. She has rather a hard life of it, I think.'

'Nothing will change you, Philip,' said Mrs. Drem. 'You must come away from here. A month in the country will do you good; and then, if your father is well enough, we shall be returning to town. Consider, Philip, what a pretty mail-phaeton you might have for the Park on the income your father proposes to give you. And I'm sure, my dear, if it is not sufficient—'

'Don't alarm yourself,' he said with a smile. 'I never knew before that I was of so much importance. I had begun to fancy that my commercial value was three pounds a week; and lo, I find myself quoted at nearly ten pounds a day! If my father did propose to buy me over, he has offered a very handsome price.'

'My dear!' said Mrs. Drem, in a tone of mild expostulation, 'why do you always talk like that of your poor father? If you knew the affectionate way in which he has been speaking of you of late; if you knew how anxious he is to have you return to the house—'

'*Connu*,' said Philip. 'How does he treat you ?'

'O, very well indeed,' said Mrs. Drem, without a faltering look or a blush on her clear pale face. 'Of course, he is a little irritable at times, like all invalids; but we must bear with him, you know. And you will have plenty of amusement,' she added, hastily getting away from the subject. 'When the snow clears, you will have abundant shooting; for your father hasn't allowed anybody to shoot this autumn, and there are plenty of birds all about, though they will be rather wild, you know. And Sir James and Violet are down at Margery Home just now; and they will dine with us to-morrow; and if there is nothing else for you to do, you and Violet can play *Les Graces* in the drawing-room. Violet and I had a little game the other day,' she continued with a smile; 'and Violet did a good deal of damage with her hoop. She ran one of her sticks, too, into the Chinese drawings, you know.'

'Then my father is not so *very* ill,' said Philip quietly.

'Not in danger—far from it,' said Mrs. Drem with demure composure; while she added, in her gentle way, 'There is a train at five minutes past four, Philip.'

'Ah, well,' said he, 'I suppose we must resign ourselves to accepting that three thousand. What if I were to give Cecil Sidmouth a thousand of it every year?'

'My dear,' said Mrs. Drem sagely, 'one always has some project like that in looking forward to getting a lot of money; but when one gets it, one always finds enough to do with it for oneself. When you return to London, you will find there is not much real difference between that and your former income.'

'You forget I have been living on three pounds a week, and have acquired economical habits.'

In the end, she persuaded him to go down into Surrey with her. What reason was there for his refusal? The old possibilities were now over; and he surrendered

himself, with something of a sigh, to his old way of living. Life had been robbed of the great purpose which he had dreamed of; now there was nothing but the old routine of somewhat monotonous pleasures. Doubtless, when once he had entered on his new career, it would be rather less dull than it now looked. He had been so long apart from the occupations of fashionable life, that they appeared to him rather tiresome; but he knew that, once again in the old sphere, he would reawaken his old interest in his old hobbies. And hobbies—which are the mildest forms of insanity—are very necessary to a man whose sole occupation in life is his own amusement. They distract the attention from regarding the vanity of life, and, by occupying his mind, prevent a man so dwelling upon death as to anticipate it.

'I must telegraph to old St. John,' he said. 'He won't mind my secession, as he has a lot of men going down to him to-morrow — some of those bachelors and relationless fellows who have no family

dinners, and get distributed at Christmas among their domestic acquaintances. And may I consider myself the owner of 3000*l.* a year? And may I walk into the Park without offence to my neighbours? And may I ask you to drive with me to Regent-street and have some luncheon?'

'All those things you may do,' said Mrs. Drem with a smile. 'And if you want any money now, you will not refuse to take some of mine?'

She held out her purse.

'I have six sovereigns,' he said. 'Surely that will carry us safely through Blanchard's and down to Thurston. I haven't tasted wine, nor been in a hansom, nor smoked a cigar, for weeks. I haven't been in the Park for six months. I have been as socially dead as Sackville Brett. By the way, did you hear what he did in revenge for their having turned him out of the Park? You know, he was so tipsy that he fell backwards out of the phaeton, and nearly got under the wheels of the Princess's carriage.'

'I heard,' said Mrs. Drem solemnly, 'that the woman who was driving was as bad as himself.'

'It seems he took it into his head that it was a general conspiracy of the Park to disgrace him by shunting him into Piccadilly; and so he went down next day in a dingy shooting-jacket and wideawake, and smoked a clay-pipe in the faces of all the people he knew as he walked up and down. The last I heard of him was, that he had gone deeply into the prophecies of Daniel, and his friends were rather anxious about him. *Delirium tremens*, I should think, was the matter.'

So they went and had some luncheon in Regent-street; and afterwards drove through the wet and dirty streets to the station, where they caught the appointed train. It was nearly six o'clock, and was quite dark, when they reached Thurston-place; and there were yellow lines of light falling from the windows on the snow of the lawn. Philip and his mother at once went up to Richard Drem's room, and entered.

'I cannot speak to you just now,' said the invalid in a weak and querulous voice. 'I am too ill; I am very ill; and you go away and leave me when I may be dying.'

'You said I might go,' said Mrs. Drem.

'Never mind — never mind; I shall shortly be out of your power to torture me. Is Philip there? Very well. Go away; don't bother me. Go downstairs, and eat and drink; and if I must die, let me die in peace.'

'You may as well say that I am welcome in the house,' said Philip.

'Don't you see I am too ill to be bothered? There's plenty of meat and drink for you downstairs. What more do you want? You will have a nice time of it, both of you, when I am gone.'

'Come away,' said Philip to his stepmother, as he opened the door and waited for her to precede him. 'We have had enough of these private theatricals.'

'O, Philip, you must not mind what he says,' she cried, in great alarm lest this reception should have frustrated her kindly

intentions. 'He does not know what he says; he is really very glad to see you.'

'So it would appear,' said Philip. 'However, it does not matter. Are the Kingscotes coming over to-night?'

'No — to-morrow night. Would you care to ride over there and dine with them rather than dine here?'

'And leave you alone? That would be a poor return for all your kindness of to-day.'

'I shouldn't mind, really, Philip,' she said. 'I am quite used to dining alone. I am sure they would be so glad to see you at Margery Home.'

'I shall walk over in the morning. What rooms am I to have?'

'You cannot have what used to be your study until to-morrow. Would you mind smoking in the conservatory this evening? I will come in and keep you company if you like—you know, I rather like tobacco.'

He knew, on the contrary, that she hated it; but this was only the renewal of her old system of sacrificing herself to

please the people round about her. This little woman was always telling lies and making pretences, which were as often unnecessary as not; but she was as full of kindliness as of hypocrisy, and, indeed, was a miracle of considerate and thoughtful goodness. She was a very tender-hearted and well-meaning woman, although there was no particle of sincerity in her facile nature. You could trust her actions, but not her words; and, indeed, the whole of her white lies and little misrepresentations were caused by her anxiety to gratify and make things pleasant for her neighbours. She would not have told a deliberate lie to have saved herself from any pain, physical or mental; but she would have told twenty to heighten Philip's enjoyment of a glass of sherry, or to have put Violet into a good-humour for a few minutes. In short, in her motherly way, she treated those around her pretty much as if they were children, and told them only what it was good for them to know.

Mrs. Drem was pleased to observe that

Philip never spoke of Lilian Seaford; and although he was at times strangely silent and moody, and again restless and discontented, he did not appear to her to dwell much on his disappointment. He would in time, she made no doubt, forget all about the Devonshire girl; and perhaps might marry Violet, as was her constant wish. She recollected, however, that there were some views of Torquay and its neighbourhood in a book which lay in the drawing-room, and she contrived that evening to hide away this book before he saw it.

CHAPTER II.

THE MARTENS' NEST.

'WHAT am I to do? what am I to do, Mrs. Lawson?' said Hickes, as he walked up and down the parlour of the small house at Hampstead, in a condition of extreme nervous agitation. 'Why will she not see me? Is it fair? How can I persuade her that I am in earnest unless I see her?'

'She doesna doubt your being in earnest,' said the old Scotchwoman, with some surprise and expostulation in her voice. 'Doubtless she kens ower weel that you were in earnest when ye went so far as to make her marry ye.'

'She is driving me mad, Mrs. Lawson,' he exclaimed in accents of complaint. 'She ought to listen to me. What is the use of her being so determined as that? Doesn't

she know that I can't live if I have to go on thinking that I have done wrong to her, and she never gives me a chance of repairing it? I tell you, she is driving me mad, Mrs. Lawson, and none of you will help me to persuade her to speak to me. It is a conspiracy amongst you, and I never did any harm to any of you, except her—except her. I tell you, if I could make her happy by killing myself, I'd do it—this minute.'

He threw himself into a chair, and Mrs. Lawson was astonished to see tears running down his face. There could be no doubt about his being in earnest.

'You aye fly to killing somebody to set matters straight,' said the old woman with some impatience. 'There has been enough o' that. She kept ye frae killing yourself by marrying ye and destroying the happiness o' her life.'

'Don't say that—don't say that, Mrs. Lawson,' cried Hickes. 'She may be happy if she likes. If she only knew how fond I have become of her—how I worship her—she would have pity on me, I know. And

if I can't persuade her that I am sincere, there may be other means. You think I haven't the courage to kill myself if I thought it would please her?'

'Toots, toots, man,' said Mrs. Lawson, 'the lassie is no a wild animal wanting to be the death o' decent human beings.'

'I'll tell you what I'll do,' said Hickes eagerly. 'I'll give her the chance of suing for a divorce—will that prove to her that I am thinking only of how to please her and not myself? I'll go away and do anything that may be taken for evidence against me—and then she could be quite free, don't you see, Mrs. Lawson. And if they want to prove cruelty too, we could get up some story among us.'

'And ye would have her name made a by-word, and make her the talk o' London!'

'What else can I do?'

'Ye should ha' thought o' that earlier,' said a severer voice, and Jims entered the room; 'ye should ha' thought o' that earlier. It is now too late to bring back the past.'

'It is not—it is not,' said Hickes. 'I

can set her free. I can make her just as she was before I ever saw her. I can kill myself.'

'Ye might do worse,' said Jims grimly, for he did not quite believe the gusty declarations of this unstable young man.

'I know what you mean,' cried Hickes. 'You want me to shoot myself, and leave her to marry Philip Drem. Do you? I won't do anything of the kind. I am her husband—I will insist on my rights. I will see her this instant; I will go upstairs and see her, and tell her to her face what I have to say. If a man cannot speak to his own wife—'

With that he rose, and was making for the door. Jims stepped in between him and the passage, and said firmly,

'Young man, this is my house, and the girl upstairs is under my protection. If you step out of this room, it is with me, not with her, ye must settle; and although I never laid hands on a stranger who was under shelter of my roof—'

The sentence was left unfinished; but

Hickes thought it prudent to relinquish his intention. He threw himself back into the chair, and said gloomily,

'It isn't you I am afraid of. I am not afraid of any man; only I don't want to quarrel. Quarrelling won't do any good. You know I could insist on seeing her, if I liked; I could bring the law to bear on both her and you. But what would that do? It would only make her hate me worse than ever.'

In his vexation he kept pulling and twisting at a new watchguard which he wore, until it snapped in two. Apparently, he paid no attention to the circumstance.

'And you know that,' he continued, 'and you ought to help me to make friends with her, instead of coming between us. Suppose things are bad enough, there is no use in making them worse; and it is very hard that she will not give me a chance of telling her how wretched I am without her — yes, wretched. And why shouldn't she be as comfortable in my house as in yours? I have plenty of money. I

have near nineteen hundred pounds; and I will give it her to spend on any house she may take a fancy to. I'll go anywhere she likes—out of London, if she prefers the country; and I will work for her like a slave. What dislike has she taken to me? What does she say against me? And what was the meaning of her cheatery and hypocrisy in being very complaisant before the marriage—and pretending she was quite well satisfied—and now breaking off, as if I was her greatest enemy.'

'If there was any cheatery and hypocrisy,' said Mrs. Lawson warmly, 'it was none of hers. Do you think she liked the marriage because she was barely civil to ye? Do you think she was happy when onybody wi' een could see that wretchedness was clouding her face from morning till night, in spite o' the way she tried to be cheerful? And, my certes, if ye canna understand why she is no in love wi' ye, after a' the ill ye have wrought, ye are a bigger gomeril than I took ye for.'

'But all that is past and gone,' said

Hickes. 'There's no use in bearing old grudges. Why not make the best of what is left to us?'

At this moment he heard steps on the gravel path outside. He started up.

'She is going out to escape me,' he cried. 'But I will see her before she goes.'

He ran to the window, however, and saw that Lilian was coming to the house, instead of going away from it. Unknown to the rest of the household, she had gone out for a short walk, and was now returning, unconscious that Hickes was within. As he looked at the slight and graceful figure dressed all in black — at the beautiful calm face which seemed to have lost all its girlish mobility and cheerfulness, and to wear a look of resigned and uncomplaining suffering — his anger and haste died wholly away. What a pure and sweet face it was! although it was somewhat paler than it used to be, and there were hard lines about the mouth. Perhaps it was this paleness which made the dark

blue eyes look darker and larger than they had been before. It was a beautiful face, but it was not a merry one; all the light-heartedness had gone from it — all hope and expectation had vanished. With that resigned and steadfast air, she seemed a woman to whom no more delight, no more interest, no more surprise, was possible.

Hickes sank down into a chair with a groan, and buried his face in his hands. The next moment the door was opened, and the pale face looked into the room. For an instant her eyes lighted upon Hickes —who did not raise his down-bent head— and there was no sudden shrinking in them, nor any sudden look of fear on the face. She merely retired, shutting the door behind her; and when Hickes looked up, he saw only Mr. and Mrs. Lawson.

'You see, she has no pity,' he said bitterly, 'none at all. She only cares for her own misery, and thinks that nobody else suffers. Why wouldn't she speak to me? Doesn't she know that I worship the ground she walks on; and that the sight of

her face, grown sad like that, makes me think of strange things? You think I am raving—perhaps I am—I don't quite understand it all—God knows that I am very miserable !'

'I am very sorry for you,' said Mrs. Lawson, for there were tears again running down the young man's face, 'but what can we do? So long as she is with us, no one shall be allowed to force her to go out of the house against her will; and if ye were to force her, ye would be a' the mair miserable afterwards. Dinna think we are fighting against ye. We leave her to her ain choice. Perhaps it might be better for everybody if she could be moved to take a liking for ye; but while she doesna do that, there is na help.'

'Does she know that I have plenty of money?'

'I will tell her.'

'Perhaps she doesn't think I could keep a house,' he said eagerly. 'Perhaps she thinks I'd be unsteady, and plunge her into difficulties. But I declare to you, Mrs.

Lawson, I'd work my fingers to the bone for her sake—I would indeed; and if she would only give me a chance of showing how I'd work for her—how attentive I'd be to her—how much I think of her—I am sure she would not be so hard-hearted.'

Very soon afterwards, he left; and yet he wandered about the place, as though loath to go away. He walked up the East Heath-road, to the fatal spot where so much wretchedness had been wrought. He stood there and tried to recall the madness of that wild night, and asked himself what devil had been in his blood and brain at that time, to provoke him into working so cruel a wrong.

'But I did not love her then,' he said to himself,—'I did not love her then; and now, when everything in the world seems wretched and miserable without her, I find myself no nearer winning her love than I did when I made her swear to marry me. What is to be the end—what is to be the end?'

He wandered about there, and returned

down the road, and passed James Lawson's house. He fancied he saw, at a window above, the shadow of a face—the face whose mute suffering rose up in judgment against him and punished him so sorely.

'Well, she has her revenge,' he said to himself as he walked on, on this cold gray day, into the town. 'How many months is it since I fancied this accursed money was all I wanted to make myself happy?—and now, when I could fill my pockets with sovereigns — when I could scatter them about to the children in the streets—I can't buy for myself a minute's peace. I wish I could always live drunk—for then I begin to believe that she must in time relent; but the waking up next morning is like hell.'

'I'll go and see the Martens,' he said suddenly. 'I am not a baby, to be always puling and crying about nothing. If I have the money, I'll have the money's worth. I'll get hold of the Martens and have a flourish.'

He called a cab and drove into Kentish-

town. He made his way to a decent-looking house in one of the larger thoroughfares, and asked whether Mr. Marten or Miss Marten was upstairs. All the Martens —the two brothers and sister—were at home; and he was accordingly shown into their parlour on the first floor.

It was a large apartment, furnished in a curious fashion; for it was the practising-room of Signor Martini, the celebrated Italian juggler, and all around were balls, bottles, swords, plates, and the other *matériel* of the Signor's art. The professor himself, as Hickes entered, was in the act of catching on the point of a cane a bottle thrown him by his sister; while the brother, in accents more Irish than Italian, criticised the performance.

Signor Martini was a tall, stout, dark-faced man, with jet-black and very oily hair. A pair of earrings he wore gave him a somewhat foreign look. His brother—who was known as Señor Tomazo, the Spanish Champion Equestrian—was a much slighter and younger man, fairer in face,

and with no superfluous flesh on his supple and well-knit figure. The girl—who was of yet another nationality, being celebrated as Mdlle. Cécile of the lofty wire—was the youngest of the three, and was a comely damsel, with rather a pretty face, coal-black eyes, hair of luxuriant length, and a frame which was evidently rendered hard and sinewy by her gymnastic efforts. For while, at a certain great circus, Tomazo flew round the sanded arena on his famous Spanish mule, and while the Signor balanced balls on the edge of a sword or kept the atmosphere full of twinkling plates, it was the province of Mademoiselle to walk backwards and forwards on a slack wire, to lie down on it and make her bed in mid-air, to kneel on it in an aspect of picturesque devotion, and to execute a series of tricks that kept the audience from breathing, and made them sigh with relief when the performance was all over. Mademoiselle, with her pretty young face and her shining costume of blue and gold, looked really very charming when she lay all her length

on this bent wire, and swung herself as if in a cradle, while the balancing-pole was kept beneath her neck, as if by way of a pillow; and she was consequently a great favourite at the circus. The three lived very happily together, except when Tomazo abused his power of drinking during the day, and made the other two envious.

'Look here,' said Hickes, 'cut this, and come and dine with me. I'll give you the best dinner I can get in London.'

'No use,' said Mdlle. Cécile—who was familiarly known as Kate—with pert frankness. 'Neither Bob nor I can touch wine, as you know, until the performance is over. Would you have him miss every ball? and would you have my head swim on the wire, and me come down a cracker? Call it supper, and we are with you. What do you say, Bob—Jack?'

'That's right,' said Bob the Signor. 'Shall we call it supper—the wedding-supper? What's come over your wife, man?'

'D—n it,' said Hickes gloomily. 'Let

her alone—I don't want *you* to talk about her.'

'And yet we were to have met her on her marriage-day,' said Kate. 'I can't help thinking it would have been such a lark, us all pretending we were drunk, and you beginning to bully her, and she thinking it was all in earnest, and running home. What did you mean by it, Sam?'

'I'm very glad now she didn't come,' said Hickes. 'I only wanted then to get rid of her for good; and if I had done it that way, I should never have had the chance of speaking to her again.'

'Then you *do* want to make it up with her?' said Kate, with lively interest. 'And it is she who has got rid of you?'

'I didn't come here to talk about her,' said Hickes angrily.

'Why don't you let him alone, Kate?' said Signor Bob. 'You women are always a precious sight too curious.—And if you really mean this supper—'

'I can't wait for supper,' said Hickes fiercely. 'I want something to do *now*—

I want something to drink. Here, you, Jack, you and I can go and get some dinner; and at night I'll give you all a supper if you like.'

'All right,' said Jack the equestrian, jumping up with alacrity; while his brother and sister eyed him with some chagrin.

'You were to have helped us to try that candle-trick,' said Kate sulkily.

'Never mind,' said her brother; 'I daresay Monsieur Bertrande will come up to console you.'

'Is that Bertrande a Frenchman?' asked Hickes, when they had got outside, glad to get talking of anything.

'A Frenchman!' cried Señor Jack contemptuously. 'No more a Frenchman than you are. He was born in London—there is the identical gutter,' he added with a sneer, as he pointed to the side of the pavement. 'And I won't have him come after my sister. I'd rather you married her—only you can't.'

'Confound you!' said Hickes with im-

patient irritation. 'The whole of you seem to talk about nothing but my marriage! Can't you let it alone?'

'No offence — no offence,' said Jack, who was rather a dull and sleepy young man, not willing to quarrel with any one.

They got into a cab, and went down to the neighbourhood of Leicester-square, where they dined at a French dining-place. There they smoked and idled until it was time for Jack to go to the circus, whither Hickes accompanied him, and was accommodated with a private box. There he sat all alone, listening rather drowsily to the dull jokes of the clowns and gazing wearily at the old and well-known comic business, at the performances of 'highly-trained steeds,' supple acrobats, and a stout lady who walked over a tight-rope with a child on her back. At last he fell sound asleep in a corner of the box.

He was awoke by being tapped on the shoulder, and starting up, found himself confronted by Arthur Drem, who was

in evening dress, and in the gayest of moods.

'Saw you from a box opposite, old fellow,' said Arthur. 'You shouldn't sleep like that — it isn't complimentary to the poor devils. I have two or three friends here; will you join us?'

'No, I won't.'

'In another fit of the dumps? Has your pretty one been treating you badly?'

'Look here,' said Hickes, with a sudden spasm of rage, 'it would take precious little to make me throw you head-over-heels down there. I'll do it some day. I warn you to keep out of my road.'

'Hoity-toity!' cried Arthur — but he receded a step all the same — 'what's the matter now? Is this the way you rejoice over your good fortune? You are the luckiest of men; and this is the way you thank me for helping you. But there, I forgive you; I see how it is. It's the old story. Man was made to mourn — and woman to be the cause of his mourning. A fellow is never satisfied unless he is

breaking his heart about somebody, instead of enjoying himself like a reasonable being. But you might at least be civil.'

'I don't want any more of your chaff.'

'Come, come,' said Arthur, 'you've woke up on the wrong side — that is all. Let's go to the bar, and have a drink; and you can come back and tell me how you have been getting on of late since you fell heir to your fortune.'

Hickes at last consented to be appeased —indeed, he was rarely of the same mind for five minutes. When they returned from the bar to the box he unbosomed himself to his old confidant, and told him in piteous accents of all that had happened, and of his own wretched plight.

'I don't believe,' he said, 'that there's as miserable a man as me in all London— not in all London. I don't blame you, Drem—it's all my own doing. And now it's done, what way am I to go? Day after day passes, and I am getting madder about her than ever; and when I see her and see how wretched she is — God help her! —

I feel as if hanging was too good for me.'

'That's only modesty on your part,' said Arthur soothingly. 'You must do something active, instead of lounging about and moping. You should enjoy the money you've got. Why don't you run away with somebody, and give yourself something to think of? I hear you are carrying on a gay flirtation with Mdlle. Cécile.'

'You hear a lie, then!' said Hickes, suddenly altering his mood into one of savage attack. 'Do you remember the stories you told me of all the good that was to be done by that infamous scheme we got up? Wasn't everybody to be made happy? Wasn't Philip Drem to go back to his father's house? Wasn't I to have a pretty wife and a lot of money? Weren't you to have your uncle's business?'

'My dear fellow, if you were less irritated by your sleep, you would see that all these things have occurred. My cousin Philip went down to Thurston on the day before Christmas, and is there now. Not

only is he good friends with his father, but I think he is likely to marry a certain young lady down there.'

'Do you think he will?' said Hickes, with great and vivid interest.

'I think he will. But what is it to you?'

'O, nothing,' said Hickes, falling into a brown study. Were Philip Drem to marry, might not Lilian be induced to turn from thinking of him?

'As I say, you have done all the good I said. Philip is reconciled with his father; you have a pretty wife and a lot of money; as for my chances of my uncle's business, I am quite satisfied. Now, what more would you like?'

At this moment, Mademoiselle Cécile came out and tripped with a pretty grace into the middle of the arena, where she bowed and kissed her hand to the spectators. Then she climbed up a ladder, got on to the 'lofty and invisible wire,' had her balancing-pole handed to her, and began her performances. She was dressed in a

tunic of blue satin, glittering with silver lace and spangles; she had knickerbockers of the same material and hue; and on the top of her mass of jet-black curls, that hung down her back, she wore a white rose that Hickes had sent her. But she had no opportunity—as an actress might have had—of sending him a brief swift glance of thanks during the performance; for while she put herself into pretty positions, representing various well-known statues, and while she walked backwards and forwards on the yielding wire, with all the muscles of her body in a state of extreme tension, poor Kate's eyes never left that thin line of iron which rose in front of her towards the opposite pole. Had her head grown dizzy—had she lost sight of the wire for an instant—there would have been a shriek from the great concourse of spectators, and a huddled heap of blue satin and senseless humanity would have had to be carried out of the ring by the attendants, with the two clowns hovering in the rear, and quite forgetting to make any joke.

'You may as well break off with your friends in the box,' said Hickes to Arthur, 'and come and have supper with us. I'll introduce you to Kate Marten. If I'm not to be jolly one way, I'll be the other. I'd be as straight as any other fellow, if I had the chance; but everything is against me—and so I mean to take what fun I can get—and you'll see how I'll make this money spin.'

Hickes, spite of his money, had returned to his old notion that the world was using him ill, and that it was not his fault if he fell into evil ways. That night he conducted himself like a madman—until even Kate Marten said she would rise and go home by herself, if he persisted in throwing away his money in preposterous extravagances. Arthur paid such particular attention to Mdlle. Cécile, that he let Hickes go on as he liked; and the latter in turn shouted and laughed, made the waiters drink champagne out of tumblers, and then fell to crying over his wretchedness and ill-luck. He seemed to be making desperate efforts

to become intoxicated, and to fail. He could not reach the goal of frantic excitement or of happy stupor. The more he drank, the more restless he became; and the wine only provoked him into magnifying his misery.

'My boy,' said Arthur to him, as he got him into a cab, 'you may make your money spin, if you like. Easily got, easily spent. But you are killing yourself.'

'It isn't my fault,' said Hickes, who began to cry again. 'She won't listen to me; she cares for nobody but him.'

'So much the worse; but why should you kill yourself because a woman won't speak to you?'

'You say that, of course!' said Hickes. 'There's no woman born would put you out. You don't care for anybody but yourself. You have no more blood than a fish. And you don't need anybody to care for you; for all the world is with you—you have lots of friends—you are respectable—you look forward to having plenty of money—'

'All this is nonsense. You must come to your senses, and consider what you mean to do.'

'I have considered,' said Hickes wildly; 'I have considered. I know what I shall do before long, if this continues, and if she will not speak to me.'

CHAPTER III.

COMING TO TERMS.

MRS. DREM was overjoyed with the turn things were taking in these spring months down at Thurston-place. Her husband gradually got better, and as he became well he evinced an extraordinary desire to be friends with his son. He was almost respectful at times, and showed such efforts to control his temper and be considerate, that Philip was really touched by his forbearance, and did everything in his power to respond to these signs of altered times.

'We need not have separate stables,' said his father to him, as they were talking of going up to town. 'When you buy your horses, I will keep them for you, and you will lend me them should any accident

happen to mine. I think I shall make one serve for the brougham; and we must send the barouche up before we go.'

'O, not for me, Richard,' said Mrs. Drem. 'I am sure, when Philip gets his phaeton—'

'He will drive you in it!' said Mr. Drem, with a sneer. 'I suppose you'd like to be driven up and down the Park in a mail-phaeton? But young men have their own friends; and that sort of thing is not suited to your time of life, ma'am.'

Mr. Drem had not included his wife in the list of those to whom he wished to be more civil than formerly; and indeed seemed inclined to visit upon her the ill-nature he no longer extended to Philip. Nevertheless, Philip and his stepmother had been all along too firm allies to suffer this peaceably; and the young man interposed on behalf of his more timid companion with a vigour which his father was forced to respect. And on this occasion he declared that the very first person he should drive in the Park would be his stepmother,

and that she would be heartily welcome to the seat whenever she chose to occupy it.

Violet and Sir James were much at Thurston during the spring of this year; and the intimacy between the two families became more and more familiar, if that were possible. Philip and Violet were, of course, thrown continually together; and Mrs. Drem looked on the pair of them like a smiling little providence in petticoats, and secretly speculated on what was to result from this constant companionship. Again and again she was on the point of talking to Philip about the chance that lay before him; and as often a certain feeling, which she could not well define, told her that it would be imprudent. At last her anxiety to have this great hope of her heart fulfilled overcame her caution, and she said to him one morning, with a little inward tremor,

'What an excellent wife Violet will make—so bright and cheerful, so clever and engaging and sensible!'

'He will be a fortunate fellow who mar-

ries her,' said Philip rather carelessly, and scarcely looking up from his book.

His stepmother was rather disappointed by the indifference of his tone; but she half suspected him of dissimulation.

'Come now, Philip,' she said, laying her hand on his shoulder, 'confess that you enjoy very much this constant rambling about with Violet; and that you are not so blind as you pretend to be about the natural consequences. If it does not matter to you, think of her. Why does she come here so often—why is she so glad to walk with you, or ride with you?'

'Well,' he said, looking up from his book with a laugh, 'you have a pretty way of paying a compliment. Do you think every woman must be as much in love with me as you are?'

A slight blush passed over Mrs. Drem's pale face, and the pretty stepmother said,

'Of course it is natural that I should expect women to fall in love with you, because I know so much of you.'

'Thank you very much. I begin to

have a very good opinion of myself, when I find myself able to withstand all this nice flattery.'

'But as for Violet,' continued Mrs. Drem, 'you must remember, Philip, that you ought not to trifle with her, if you are not in earnest. She is a particular friend of ours. When you return to London, you may go on as you please with other girls; but with Violet—I would not have her feelings hurt for the world.'

'What does all this mean?' he said, with a look of profound surprise. 'Are you serious? You cannot be. Violet and I have not altered in the least our old relations. Hurting her feelings! Yes, if you forgot to help her at lunch, or made fun of her ferns. She is too sensible; the most perfect confidence exists between us.'

'But there are some things which a girl dare not tell,' said Mrs. Drem insidiously.

'But Violet tells me everything, from the wine she would rather have at dinner to the plan she has laid for spending 5000*l.* a year, should she ever get it, which is not

likely. And I know the name of the man she would like to marry.'

'She cannot have told you that,' said Mrs. Drem, somewhat aghast. 'You don't mean her old school-girl liking for Lord Cecil?'

'I am not going to tell tales,' said Philip; 'but you may rest content about Violet's feelings: she is a remarkably sharp young woman.'

'You are most unjust to her!' exclaimed Mrs. Drem.

'I am nothing of the kind,' said Philip. 'Is a girl any the worse for knowing what to eat and drink—for knowing the value of money—for having a pretty correct notion of the people around her? Violet is the most charming girl who comes to your house—out and away the most charming; and if I were condemned to marry, I should ask for no greater happiness than to have her for my executioner. There!' he added impatiently, as he flung down his book and walked to the door; 'why will you always talk about marriage?'

He strode out of the house, and she watched him descend into the valley, and disappear down one of the lanes.

'I know what that means,' she said with a sigh. 'The old story coming up again; and he will walk about the country all day by himself, and come home at night looking so tired and wretched and miserable. Will he never forget it?'

Philip had just disappeared, when she saw two figures on horseback riding along the bottom of the valley; and these she soon discovered to be Sir James Kingscote and his daughter. A few minutes thereafter the horses were at the door; and presently Violet was in the room.

'What is the matter?' said Mrs. Drem, alarmed by the unwonted trouble that was visible in the young girl's face.

'O, Mrs. Drem,' she said, 'such a dreadful thing has happened! That railway, you know,—the company has smashed up, and papa is ruined—absolutely ruined. Where is Mr. Drem? He wishes to see him at once.'

Sir James was in the hall; and he had already sent a servant to ask whether Mr. Drem could be seen. The man forthwith conducted him to the room in which Mr. Drem was to be found; and Mrs. Drem returned to Violet.

'Everything was going on so pleasantly,' said the girl, 'that I had begun to fancy it was all right. You know papa would not tell me anything about it; and it was only through Philip that I heard. And as Philip has said nothing for some time, I thought it was getting quite straight again.'

'My dear,' said Mrs. Drem, 'don't excite yourself; the failure of a single company is nothing. Your papa may lose some money—'

'He will lose everything, Mrs. Drem,' said Violet. 'All his money—and it wasn't much—was sunk in that company years ago, when it looked so promising; and Margery Home was heavily mortgaged to get the funds.'

'You mustn't mind, Violet,' said Mrs. Drem. 'People don't die because a com-

pany breaks. You won't have to leave Margery Home, depend on it. You may have to endure a good deal of pinching until you pull through, you know; but you will pull through. Why, my husband will be sure to give Sir James whatever he wants.'

'O no!' said Violet. 'Women might help each other in that way, but men never do. If Mr. Drem helps papa, it will be in the way of business; and what are we to offer him for the money?'

'*We!* So you have made yourself a partner? Well, then, you must sell us yourself.'

'What use would I be to you?'

'I would give 50,000*l.* for you, if I had it,' said Mrs. Drem, kissing the girl in an affectionate way.

'I wish I was worth that to anybody,' said Violet with a sigh.

'You would be worth far more than that to Philip, if you would only be his wife,' said Mrs. Drem, blushing somewhat.

'I thought you meant that,' said Violet

rather absently; 'and I am afraid both Mr. Drem and papa will propose it.'

'My darling!' cried Mrs. Drem, taking both her hands, 'I should bless the day that made you my daughter. And what are you crying for, my dear?'

For the tears had sprung to the girl's eyes, as she stood there silently contemplating what the future might have in store for her; and this exhibition of grief was so new on the part of the light-hearted Violet, that Mrs. Drem, at first surprised, was profoundly touched, and fell to kissing and soothing the girl as if she had been her own daughter.

Sir James entered the room in the middle of this pretty business.

'What,' he said, 'has she taken this company-matter so much to heart?'

He was looking quite cheerful; and Violet started up, with a curious searching glance directed towards her father's face.

'Girls don't understand these things, do they?' said Sir James. 'But they know

enough to vex themselves and get a good cry.'

'Were not you vexed as we rode over, papa?' said Violet.

'How long ago is that?' said Sir James gaily. 'Ay! the fact is, you timid people must know that my friend Mr. Drem has proved himself a true friend, and that together we mean to get over this troubled time.'

'Didn't I tell you so!' said Mrs. Drem reprovingly to Violet.

Violet looked with a doubtful expression from the one to the other, and said nothing. But no sooner was the visit over, nor had they ridden a hundred yards from the house, than Violet abruptly asked:

'Papa, what arrangement did you make with Mr. Drem?'

'Now, how could I explain such matters to you?' said Sir James.

'I want to know,' said Violet. 'He is to give you money, I suppose,—what does he expect you to do in return?'

'My dear child,' said Sir James in the

'I know,' said Violet in the same tone. 'But he has not asked me to marry him.'

'But he will.'

'I think nothing is farther from his thoughts; and I am sure nothing has been farther from mine.'

There was a little sigh of resignation accompanying this statement which made Sir James turn in his saddle and regard her with some surprise. But presently he had recovered his equanimity.

'I never knew one of you different. Wayward, intractable, pretending to be hurt when you're pleased, angry with those who are doing their best for you. Never mind, my girl; I don't want you to say you wish to marry Philip Drem. It isn't time yet, if he has not asked you. But everybody takes it for granted. Here are you and he continually together.'

'That is our doing, not his,' said Violet. 'We go there ten times for once he comes to us. And he and I have been playmates ever since we were children.'

'The more reason you should carry on

the game until you get into your second childhood,' said Sir James. 'Why, everybody knows he is going to marry you.'

'Everybody knew he was going to marry Mary Thormanby. I am sure it is not his fault. People won't let him alone. They are always fancying he is going to marry somebody.'

'I suppose I represent the "people" you talk of? But I don't understand you, Violet. Do you mean to say you dislike Philip Drem?'

'How could I, papa? He is one of my best friends.'

'Friends! friends! That is what all girls say. Have you anything to say against his marrying you?'

'Papa, he has not asked me,' she said in despair. 'Please don't talk any more about it—you don't understand.'

'I understand very well, and I won't talk any more about it. Only you must listen to this, like a good girl. Don't go away with any notion in your head that I have sold, or bought, or made any money

transactions about you whatever. I would sooner see Margery Home sold inch by inch than that you should suffer any such wrong. Now don't begin to cry, Violet; you know I can't bear crying. This monetary transaction has nothing to do with your wishes. You are quite free. Only, as both Mr. Drem and myself took it for granted that Philip and you will marry each other some day, that conviction made it easy for Mr. Drem to advance me a certain sum to meet these present difficulties. That is the whole transaction. You are not bound by it. Marry Philip Drem or not, as you please; only don't go and cast him off through contrariety, merely because you think we want to bind you to it. O, I know you little plagues very well. But I have confidence in your good sense, Violet. You must not do anything wilful, for my sake. Consider what our home has been to us. You would not like to leave it, I know. And although I daresay, if the worst came to the worst, I could go into some sort of business, and earn enough for both of us—'

'O, don't speak of it!' cried Violet; 'don't speak of it, papa! I will do all you want; I will do anything you like; only you must not leave Margery Home.'

Three or four days elapsed before Violet saw Thurston-place again. London was beginning to fill, and the mental eyes of innumerable families, hid away in corners of counties, were turned to the great centre, and saw the gathering crowd begin to enjoy the rush and run and glitter of the season. Mr. Drem was just about to return, although Mincing-lane, and not the Row, was the object of his thoughts. Sir James too, although he could better have afforded to remain in the country, deemed it prudent to arrive with the stream, for his daughter's sake.

The Kingscotes were to spend the second last day at Thurston-place; and accordingly Sir James and Violet went over in the forenoon, and idled about until luncheon time. During that practical, sensible, and satisfactory meal, Violet told Philip she wished to speak a few words with him by and by.

Accordingly, when they rose from the table, he and she passed outside to the lawn, then chatted a bit, then drew off a space farther, then finally went off for a ramble, fancying themselves unperceived. Of course everybody saw them, and was not grieved when they disappeared, alone, round by the lime-tree walk. It was a beautiful spring day, full of sunlight and the odour of opening buds.

'You are going up to town to-morrow,' said Violet.

'Yes,' said Philip, a little surprised by the oddness of her tone.

'I have something very particular to say to you, Philip. You know that my father is in great money-difficulties?'

'I heard something of it.'

'And that he asked Mr. Drem to assist him?'

'So I understand.'

'Do you know anything more?'

'No; that is, I believe my father has relieved Sir James from all present anxiety, and I am very glad. Look here, Violet—

you and I are such old friends that I am going to say something rather odd to you. I have a lot of money, and nothing particular to do with it. Now, you won't be offended—'

'But you don't seem to know,' she exclaimed in great excitement—'you don't seem to know why Mr. Drem gave papa that money. O Philip, they want me to marry you!'

And she burst into tears.

'That is no discovery, is it?' said Philip, with a smile.

'But don't you see, Philip, papa cannot have this money unless I marry you. O, tell me what I am to do!'

'Poor little thing!' he said compassionately, 'they want to marry it against its will, do they? Why, Violet, where is the common sense you used to be so proud of? I don't think your great desire not to marry me is any great compliment; but still, my poor Violet, do you think I am an ogre to eat you up in spite of yourself? They cannot make us marry. I won't marry you—

unless you ask me prettily. Didn't you ever hear of the young lady who was asked by a young gentleman if she would marry him, and answered, "Yes, please." There, dry your eyes, like a good girl, and resume your ordinary amount of self-possession, which, I may say, is considerable. I won't marry you until you come some day and say very nicely, "Please, Philip, will you be good enough to become my husband?" And then I'll consider it.'

Miss Violet bridled up a bit at this.

'You'd better not wait for that time,' she said, 'or you will be rather tired of waiting. But you have not told me what I am to do, Philip. We are both of one mind, but here is this business of money. Your father won't give papa the money unless he thinks we are going to marry.'

'Now you are talking like yourself, Violet. We will let him think it, and your papa also. The money Sir James wants is, I daresay, not so vast a sum—*and he must have it directly.* Let us act the part of affianced lovers until he gets the money.

There can be no harm in the deception—for the money he will get is in one sense mine.'

The girl reddened violently, and he said, 'I beg your pardon, Violet; I didn't mean to remind you of that, but it would occur to you in any case. We are going up to town. You must exercise your skill so as to lead people in general to believe we are only friends, as before (that you may not be compromised), but at home we may conduct ourselves like engaged people. Do you know how?'

'O yes,' said Violet; 'at least I know how a gentleman conducts himself when he is engaged. He seems to be always pulling on his gloves nervously, as if he wanted to go out; and always simpering anxiously at the young lady, and bothering her with what he thinks funny speeches—and disarranging her music—and getting angry if she goes down with anybody else to dinner—and stands in a corner and scowls when she is dancing with anybody else—and is particularly civil to her brother, and to her

sister's governess, until he finds out that she dislikes the governess, and then he turns round and hates that meek lady furiously; and he is always hanging about in the afternoon, when one wants to go to the library; and he thinks it fine to neglect his duties, and make a boast of it, for her sake—and generally to make himself rather ridiculous and desperately in the way.'

'That is how gentlemen who are engaged conduct themselves?'

'Such as I have seen.'

'And how do girls who are engaged conduct themselves?'

'I don't know,' said Violet demurely.

'And how do young persons who are engaged conduct themselves, when they find themselves together? For we must begin and try.'

'O,' she said quietly, 'if it is that you mean, I will give you a kiss — for your kindness.'

And so she granted him in a very matter-of-fact way that tiny reward; but

it was not the first, nor yet the hundredth time, that a similarly meek and cousinly embrace had marked the even and gentle current of this friendship.

CHAPTER IV.

DREAMS AND VISIONS.

In one of the saddest of his songs Heine bids his sweetheart lay her hand on his heart, and listen to the knocking in the small chamber within. There is a cunning and wicked carpenter living there, he tells her, and the carpenter is working and hammering at a coffin. The carpenter hammers and knocks by day and by night; and soon the coffin will be ready, and sleep near. Is it true, then, that Love, which makes the heart beat faster, is the colleague of Death? Lilian began to dream dreams and see visions during the long evenings up at Hampstead; and in these *Traumbilder* — gazing on which she was withdrawn from the world around her, and wholly unconscious of it—she seemed

to see Love and Death together; the one angry and passionate and wretched, the other calm and serious and sweet. And it appeared to her that Love, whom she feared, had taken her by the hand, and led her a little way, and confided her to Death, whose pale and earnest face was full of kindness to her.

'Ye maun go to Torquay,' said Jims abruptly, looking at her.

'To Torquay!' she said, with a blush of colour mantling into the wan cheeks, and a wistful light appearing in the dark-blue eyes.

'Yes, indeed!' said Mrs. Lawson, with no less decision. 'Ye want something to put new life into your blood. Ye've been sitting and moping here until your hands are thin and blue-white like paper, and your eyes are sunken and dark, and your cheeks are no as fresh and rosy as they used to be. Torquay—that's your doctor.'

'I should like to go down to Torquay —for a day or two,' said Lilian; 'but the fares are so expensive.'

of that journey—and of the eager delight of the young girl, who was alternately laughing and crying with the joy of seeing again the old familiar places. Could this be the same creature, who had grown so impassive—whose lips were white, and thin, and hard? When they caught the first glimpse of the sea near the mouth of the Teign, her eyes dilated somewhat, and seemed to drink in the rich blue colour of the great sweep of sunlit water; but otherwise she betrayed no special interest. She mentioned to Alec, briefly and curtly, the names of the places as they went along, and that was all their conversation.

Nor did she betray any emotion when, in the calm yellow evening, they came in sight of Tor Bay, with the long sweep of coast lying under a ruddy haze, and the green hills and white houses of Torquay shining in the sun. They were fortunate enough to get some lodgings without any trouble—in Higher-terrace the rooms were, looking out over the harbour towards the bay. They all went out for a walk after-

'Expense or no expense,' said Mrs. Lawson, 'ye are going to Torquay; no for one day, nor two, nor three — but until we've got the pink into your face again.'

The end of it was, that the whole family migrated to Devonshire; Alec getting his month's holidays then instead of in the summer, and going with them. They went down in a second-class carriage; but in view of the spring sunlight, and the mellow air, and the young fresh colours of the woods and hedges, they did not mind that. And when the first salt breath of the sea blew through the carriage, it was like the touch of a magic wand, waking a whole crowd of recollections, some pleasant and sweet, some tender and sad. As for Lilian, sitting in the corner and looking out vaguely on the scenes that rushed past, you would have thought she had no memory. Did she recall nothing of that former journey down here with Philip, that she sat so cold and reserved, with a wan look in her eyes? Jims reminded himself

of that journey—and of the eager delight of the young girl, who was alternately laughing and crying with the joy of seeing again the old familiar places. Could this be the same creature, who had grown so impassive — whose lips were white, and thin, and hard? When they caught the first glimpse of the sea near the mouth of the Teign, her eyes dilated somewhat, and seemed to drink in the rich blue colour of the great sweep of sunlit water; but otherwise she betrayed no special interest. She mentioned to Alec, briefly and curtly, the names of the places as they went along, and that was all their conversation.

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wards, except Lilian. She remained in the house alone, in spite of their united entreaties. She said she was a little tired—did not feel disposed to walk—would rather remain by herself.

'My lassie,' said Mrs. Lawson anxiously, 'ye maun be out o' doors from morning till night until we see your colour back. We havena brought ye down to Torquay that ye should sit in a room.'

'You are very kind, Mrs. Lawson,' was all she said. 'I will go out as much as you like by and by, but not to-night.'

The Lawsons did not remain out long; but when they returned, Lilian had retired to her own room.

'I guessed as much,' said Mrs. Lawson; 'for when we went out, I saw she had in her hand a little prayer-book that Mr. Philip gave her.'

Then, when Alec had gone off also, and the old people were left by themselves, Mrs. Lawson said, in a complaining way,

'Nothing seems able to break this dreadfu' stillness that's ower her. I would

rather she were ever so wild wi' grief, rather than this settled look on her face, that makes ye think she only wants to get into her grave and have done. Who would ha' thocht that a' this would come o't? It would have been far better for her to have done as Hickes wanted — let him come about the house until she got accustomed to regard him as her friend, and then as her husband. Whatever he may be, he aye seemed anxious to please her and be kind to her.'

'We maun leave her to the decision o' her ain heart,' said Jims. 'I'm no inclined to think that Hickes is a stable young man; but she might have made him better, and given him a house and household affairs to look after and steady him. But that's neither here nor there. Let her be his wife, or nobody's wife, I carena—if only she gets well.'

'Jims,' said Mrs. Lawson, 'I'm fair terrified when I look at her white face, that is like stone. I hope something 'll break that hardness that seems killing her.'

'Whisht!' said Jims. 'What is that?'

He went to the window, which was open, his wife following. Outside the night was dark, though there was a pale green light over the western horizon. A few stars were visible, and behind Waldon-hill a crescent moon was helping to lend a faint radiance to the eastern skies.

Lilian's room was just over that in which they stood; and as they listened, they heard a sound as of a girl sobbing bitterly.

'She is at the window,' whispered Mrs. Lawson. 'I will go up to her room.'

When the old woman went upstairs and opened the door gently, she was greatly surprised by what she saw before her. The girl was sitting at the open window, her long hair falling in dishevelled masses about her shoulders—her hands clasped over a small prayer-book—while she sobbed wildly, and uttered incoherent murmurings of affection, in which the listener caught the name of Philip. Beyond this figure, which seemed dressed all in white, the open win-

dow showed an expanse of dark sea, with a pallid green sky overhead, and the white crescent of the moon.

Lilian started up pale and terrified, to confront the intruder. It seemed to Mrs. Lawson that there was something wild in the girl's face, and that the white dress made her look ghastly and spectral.

'You are so unhappy!' she said. 'Why did you never tell us?'

'I could not tell you,' said the girl, in accents of strange excitement; 'I cannot tell you now. I have been praying to God that I might die; and He will not let me—He will not let me.'

'Lilian!'

'I would rather die—I should like to die—and here, at Torquay. I never knew what life was until the time that Philip and I were here—and then it was only a month—only a month!'

'Lilian, think of the harm you are doing yourself by exciting yourself like this. See how you tremble — and your face is white.'

'And you think I am going to die, then?' said the girl with an expression of joy that seemed like madness. 'I dreamed last night that I was coming down here to die—that I met Death, like an old man with white hair, down by the sea; and he took my hand, and I was not afraid. Do you think I should be afraid, if I were to die now? I should only be going to meet my mother; and Philip would come —after I am dead—to my grave, and think kindly of me. I never did anything to him that he could think unkind, did I?'

'Lilian, you are breaking my heart,' said the old woman, with the tears running fast down her withered gray cheeks. 'We have brought you down here to cure you of your white face and your sadness, and to make you well and cheerful again, and yet you talk of dying. You are not the brave girl you used to be. If your mother were here now, what would she say to this wicked notion of yours?'

'I have asked her,' said the girl, turning to the open window, where the stars

were visible,—'I have asked her; but she will not speak.'

'Do you know what will happen to you, if you indulge these fancies? You will not die—you will grow mad. And I won't have anything of the kind. I am going to bring back the smile to your face, as sure as I am an old woman, who would be very miserable if anything happened to you. And I will sleep with you to-night, to see that there is no more of this sitting up and dreaming at an open window. It seems to me that there has been a good deal of it lately.'

'I once asked you to sleep with me, Mrs. Lawson,' she said, 'because I was afraid I might die, if my heart went on beating so. Now I am not afraid; but if that were to happen in the night, I should want you to telegraph to Philip; and he might come in time.'

'Now, now,' said the old woman, 'no more. Get off your things, and get to bed; to-morrow morning you will find the sea-air putting new blood into your veins.

You must pick up your spirit, my bairn; for we canna afford to lose ye, and that's the truth. Ye have become a pairt o' our ain lives, and it would maist kill us puir auld bodies if anything were to happen to ye. And it winna happen, if ye will only be sensible and show some courage. Take my word for it, my lassie, ye will find plenty in the world worth living for yet.'

Next morning Lilian went out with Alec, to show him the neighbourhood. The day was bright and clear, with a warm south wind blowing over the bay laden with saline fragrance. They rambled about together in the sunlight and the fresh air—round by the lofty eastern cliffs, with the clear green water far below them—back behind the town and on to the wooded lanes and leafy nooks lying south-west of the old abbey—and then returning to the Livermead rocks, and so home by the sunset. When they got into the house, Alec's face was red with the sunlight, his eyes full of joy, and his speech almost incoherent in praise of all that he had seen.

Lilian, on the contrary, had been very grave and silent during this long walk; and now she merely sat down by the window and looked out at the sea. She had no adventures to tell, as in the olden times. She did not insist on everybody praising her beloved Devonshire. She did not beg them to declare there was no bay in the world so blue as Tor Bay. She sat quite silent, and seemed rather tired.

But one of them proposed that next day they should go and see the Dart; and then she said, so suddenly that it sounded like a piteous cry,

'O, not up the Dart! I cannot go up the Dart with you, Alec!'

'Why?' said the boy wonderingly.

His grandmother put her hand on his arm; and he did not press the question.

Next day Alec went and saw the Dart by himself. As he sat on the deck of the steamer, the drowsy heat of the day inclining him to dreams, and glided up and past the green woods, the grassy hills, and the daisied banks, he saw from a distance the

figure of a man who walked by himself under the shadow of some trees by the river-side.

'How like he is to Philip Drem!' he said; but the alder-branches presently hid this solitary stranger from sight.

CHAPTER V.

CECIL'S FAREWELL.

'My dear fellow, how are you?' said Major Delaney to Philip. The Major had cut Mr. Philip dead several times when that young man was merely the secretary to some society or other. But now Mr. Philip was on horseback, and the Major was leaning over the railings in the Park, and the time was May, and there was much wealth and fashion abroad, of which the Major liked to be considered a part.—'Where have you been this long time?' he asked, just as if he had never seen his young friend since he and Lord Cecil dined at the Major's house.

'O, in the country—anywhere,' said Philip good-naturedly. What was the use of quarrelling with the poor Major?

'That was Miss Kingscote who went on there with her father, wasn't it?'

'Yes.'

'Handsome little girl. I hear Sir James will be in the *Gazette* shortly.'

'That's all nonsense,' said Philip. 'He is no more likely to be in the *Gazette* than either you or I.'

'Faith, I hope he'll be never as near it as I am,' said the Major with a laugh.

'How is Miss Thormanby?'

'Very well indeed. She is walking here somewhere with Mrs. Delaney. Shall I tell them you want to see them?'

'If you will take my horse for a turn or two, I will go and find them.'

Mrs. Delaney and her niece were seated on two penny chairs under the cool shade of a tree. When Philip went forward to his old sweetheart, a faint colour leapt to the pale face; but the next second she was talking to him with perfect composure, as if nothing had occurred. Philip began to think that there was some mistake somewhere—that it was impossible he could

ever have been in love with this woman.

'We saw you riding up and down with Miss Kingscote,' said Miss Thormanby. 'How very pretty she is! And she knows how to keep her dark hair smooth round her forehead, to suit the style of her face.'

'Yes,' said Philip; 'she would look very different, if she were to send her hair into hysterics all round her head.'

'I hope Mr. Drem is better,' said Mrs. Delaney. And her niece began to fear that something awkward would be said.

'Yes,' replied Philip; 'he has returned to town almost well. He has been all the winter down in Surrey.'

'So I hear,' said Mrs. Delaney; adding, with a little toss of her head, 'av course we only learn by reports. Mrs. Drem thought fit to forgeth us the moment you left the house. Sure I am we were not so sorry; but she moight have minded her manners.'

'What do you think of those fans with the green grass all round?' said Mary

Thormanby in a desperate hurry, aiming at the first object she saw.

'They are more appropriate to the season at least,' rejoined Philip, also making a wild jump at a remark, 'than the white fans with the fur.'

'I don't bear malice—will be glad to see you, Mr. Drem, anny time it is convanient to ye.'

'You are very kind, Mrs. Delaney.'

'As for Mrs. Drem—'

'These parasol-whips are absurd, are they not?' broke in Miss Thormanby.

'Yes, unless one could get the sun to change each way one drove. You can't put the whip at the back of your head, for example.'

'Will you dine with us this evening, Mr. Drem?' said Mrs. Delaney, who was determined to make hay while the sun was shining.

'I am very sorry—I am engaged for this evening,' said Philip.

'You needn't make a stranger av yourself,' she said, 'merely because your step-

mother has cut us, I hope. I'd like to know what we did—beyand being civil to you—'

'If I drove, I should drive now, in the forenoon,' said Mary Thormanby hastily. 'It must be so much pleasanter to have the whole place pretty nearly to oneself.'

'Why are you not riding?' he asked.

'Because I haven't a horse at present,' she said frankly.

So they chatted on for a few minutes together, and Mr. Philip was quite pleased to find that he and she got on so well. He fancied that she was a good deal more complaisant to acquaintances (to which lower grade he had now evidently sunk) than to friends; but the real explanation of the matter was, that she saw plainly he did not care whether she spoke civilly to him or not. He was independent of her moods. Had she practised any of her little perversities of old, he could have found an easy remedy in merely rising and bidding her good-bye. They met, therefore, on quite amicable terms; for she knew that

she had lost her empire over him, and might as well submit to the altered state of affairs. When the Major came up with his horse, Philip left Mary Thormanby in very good spirits, and promised to her aunt that he should see them all very soon.

In a short time Philip had established the old relations existing between his fair acquaintance and himself, and accepted the not very onerous duties of his new position. His father was now wonderfully considerate to him—that is to say, Mr. Drem tried to control his temper, and gave his son presents, and endeavoured to establish some sort of harmony between them. The son responded to these advances with every show of respect, until Mrs. Drem was quite a happy woman when she saw the prosperous results of her work. She herself, it is true, did not come in for her due share of the prevailing cordiality; but Philip espoused her cause so warmly, and so quickly resented his father's exhibitions of ill-temper towards her, that Mr. Drem soon

came to see that the easiest way to propitiate Philip was to be polite to his stepmother. And she, as Philip had vowed, was the very first to enter his new phaeton with him; and Mrs. Drem was proud and pleased indeed to find herself in the Park along with her stepson, and to show to her acquaintances that if there were disagreements in the family, she was not the cause of them.

'They used to say I spoiled you, Philip. Perhaps it was true. But you have not proved ungrateful, as spoiled children generally do. And now there is only one thing more that I can ask of you, and then I shall be content.'

'What is that?'

'Ah, don't you know?' said Mrs. Drem, her eyes wandering to where Violet Kingscote sat in conversation with Philip's father.

'I know,' said Philip with a sigh. And then he rose and went away.

His father too had seen the prudence of allowing this affair to be negotiated by Mrs. Drem. He himself never mentioned

it; but Philip was given to understand that it was the one project on which Mr. Drem had set his heart, and that the social life of Sir James actually hung upon it.

'Hasn't my father given Sir James that money yet?' said Philip one day, rather impatiently, to Mrs. Drem.

'Not yet,' said she.

'But why? He must have the money soon.'

'I think he would like to see you and Violet more like—like engaged,' stammered Mrs. Drem.

'Would he like to have us kiss each other before a roomful of people? Doesn't he see that we are always together; that I pay her as much attention as I can, short of worrying the life out of her?'

'You haven't asked her to marry you yet, have you?' said Mrs. Drem timidly.

'Look here,' said Philip. 'Violet and I are not going to have ourselves transformed into merchandise in this fashion. You insult the girl. You are forcing her to understand that she is being sold for a

sum of money. No woman of spirit would suffer such a thing; and Violet has plenty of spirit. I give you fair warning—I know what she will do. You will provoke her into open defiance; and she will declare that she will not marry me under any circumstances whatever.'

Mrs. Drem got alarmed, and told her husband.

'She has none of his headstrong nonsense,' said he shrewdly. 'She knows the value of money better than he does. She would not give up the chance of saving her father, and getting a rich husband, merely for a fanciful notion like that.'

'I don't know,' said Mrs. Drem dubiously. 'Violet is very sensitive and wilful on some points. O, I wish they would marry now, and have done with it!'

'I wish they would,' said Mr. Drem. It was the first time he had agreed with his wife since the day of their marriage.

Philip reported to Violet the conversation he had had with his stepmother.

'You are a very wicked person, Philip,'

said Violet. 'They say women are so deceitful, in concealing the truth and smoothing unpleasant matters. But we cannot tell downright bold stories as gentlemen do—scowling at you all the time, and talking in a careless loud voice, as though you dared not disbelieve them.'

'Will you kindly inform me what "story" I told?' said Philip.

'It was as good as one, then—to say you were afraid I would not marry you, if I found out about the money.'

Philip laughed heartily.

'There,' said he, 'I think you have got yourself into as pretty a fog as I have seen for some time. I tell a "story" when I say, I am afraid you will not marry me! Am I to understand and believe that you do mean to marry me?'

'I will not be driven into a corner,' she said, 'with your firstlies and fifthlies. It is bad enough to be wicked; but to pretend not to know that you are wicked is far worse.'

'I should advise you,' said Philip, 'to

be a good deal more respectful to me; because, as matters stand, people are beginning to think that we are engaged; and by and by, when you have compromised yourself beyond power of recall, I might suddenly marry you. And I am by nature revengeful.'

Now this was said as a jest; but both of them had cause to remember it some little time thereafter. For it was actually the case that Rumour had conferred the consecration of an engagement upon the heads of these young people; and, truth to say, Rumour had some ground for the inference. Both Philip and Violet forgot about that line of demarcation which was to separate their private and public conduct. They got so accustomed to go about as close friends, that at balls and dinners, at picnics and croquet parties, in the Row and at church, in theatre and out of theatre, you always found them together. Could anything be plainer? Mr. Drem ceased to have any more doubts. Even Mrs. Drem was satisfied. Her last wish

was about to be accomplished, and the measure of her happiness would be full.

One afternoon Violet called upon Mrs. Drem, and seemed strangely distracted in manner.

'I want to see Philip,' she said. 'Is he at home?'

'I think so,' said Mrs. Drem. 'I heard him say something about his phaeton only a few minutes ago.'

'Would you see if he is in?' said Violet rather anxiously. 'I wish to see him particularly—and alone, please, Mrs. Drem.'

Philip was sent for, and came. Mrs. Drem left the room.

'O, Philip, do you know what has happened?' said Violet; and she went forward and gave him a letter. Her face was quite pale.

Philip recognised the handwriting of Lord Cecil Sidmouth.

'Am I to read all this?' he asked, looking at the number of closely-written sheets that he held in his hand.

'Yes,' said Violet.

The letter was a curious one. It began, in the most matter-of-fact way, to say that the writer was on the point of starting for America; that he had persuaded a number of his friends to go with him; that they had determined to join a Socialist community which had just been established there; and that they meant to give at least ten years to the experiment.

'We shall encounter ridicule and opposition of every kind,' continued Lord Cecil, 'and we are prepared for it. We shall have all the Owen and Fourier failures brandished in our faces: that does not matter. What we have most to fear is, the physical break-down of men who have become effete under the influences of Eastern civilisation, and also the lapses of those for whom our code may become too severe. Shall I tell you the basis of our system, Violet, that you may understand what our enterprise is? We believe that the first and best principles of morality known to the world are founded on physiological facts. We go a step farther, and say that morality

is the best law of life—the law which best squares humanity with the conditions surrounding it. Whatever we find necessary to the intellectual, moral, or physical welfare of our small community — that is morality; and we mean to enforce it by law. We shall feel our way gradually. We shall not divorce the intellect from the conscience, nor the claims of digestion from either. We shall look upon man as one being; and whatever we find best suited to increase the comfort and usefulness of his life, that shall be our morality, and be made incumbent on us by law. We exclude none of the virtues and graces which may properly accompany this state of affairs. But whatever is seen to militate against the moral or physical health of the community, that is a blunder and a crime which must be expunged. We shall pass strict laws on drainage as well as on marriage—'

'Have they ladies going out with them to the backwoods?' said Philip.

'You will see farther on,' said Violet,

apparently anxious that he should get to the end of the document.

'— we shall punish lying as well as theft; in short, we shall have our code embrace, by degrees, every provision for our mutual safety, independence, and moral and physical health. When experience has taught us how to construct this system, we shall expect every one to conform to it, under threat of expulsion—'

'How do they propose to expel the black sheep? They must hire policemen from the Gentiles outside,' said Philip.

'Pray read on,' said Violet impatiently.

Accordingly Philip merely glanced over the rest of the letter, which was, in truth, a complete exposition of the aims and principles of the new sect. Many things were spoken of in it which Violet could not be expected to understand; and it was clear that Lord Cecil, before leaving England, had left in her hands this manifesto as to his future intentions, that she might communicate it to the circle of their mutual acquaintances.

Philip returned her the letter.

'It is full of courage and hope,' he was proceeding to say, when she interrupted him.

'You have not read the last few lines. Look, Philip!'

The lines which he had overlooked were these:

'I am on the eve of starting. You will forgive me for not calling and bidding you good-bye personally; I could not bear the pain, I think. I am told on every hand that you and Philip are about to marry; and I should have supposed so, if I had not been told. I wish you every happiness, Violet; and Philip knows that I shall not grudge him his good fortune. Shall you and he ever come to see us in America, I wonder? Good-bye, Violet. God bless you; you deserve to be as happy as I wish you to be.'

Philip laid down the letter slowly.

'It is you who have done this,' said the girl to him, almost fiercely. 'It is you who have sent him away from us; perhaps

never to come back any more. You have done it, in your selfishness and carelessness. Why did you not tell him that we were not engaged—nor ever likely to be ?'

She spoke with a vehemence that was strangely different from her ordinary cool composure; and her face was white, and her dark eyes full of indignation and fire. This woman, who stood there passionate and scornful, with her thin nostrils dilated, her lips firm, and her gestures quick and haughty, was very different from the pretty Violet Kingscote, with the smooth black hair, the placid face, and easy demeanour. Philip regarded her for a moment with some surprise, and then he said gently,

'You are unjust, Violet. If Lord Cecil has gone away through a mistake, we can easily bring him back. He does not say in the letter that he has started for America merely because he heard an absurd rumour that we were to be married.'

'But I know that is the cause—I can see it all through the letter, however he may seek to conceal it,' she exclaimed hastily.

'He is too generous to think that I am to blame; but I know what has caused him to go away from his people, and his home, and his friends, on this wild attempt; and I *am* to blame. I have been the cause of it all.'

'Nonsense!' cried Philip. 'First you blamed me; now you blame yourself. Why don't you blame Cecil, who is really in fault? For why should he have started off merely on account of a rumour? Why did he not give you a chance of explanation?'

'Philip, we have behaved very badly to him,' said Violet in milder tones.

'We can write and tell him to come back,' said Philip.

'Don't you see he says he has not left his address in Europe, that he may try this experiment without interference. Besides,' she added, looking down to the ground, 'I could not ask him to come back, except on one condition; and that has never been spoken of between us.'

'You never gave him the right, then, to ask the truth about this rumoured engagement?'

'No,' she answered, with her eyes still cast down, and her face hot. 'He was too proud; it was the old story about money, you know—that horrid money!'

Then she added presently,

'You must not think, Philip, that I am vexed about his going for my own sake. But I know why he has gone; and I know that I am the cause of his leaving all his friends, and seeking some wild and wretched prairie or desert, where he may die and nobody know anything about it. It makes me feel so wretched when I think of his living away out there in banishment. I do not want him back for my own sake; you must not misconstrue anything I said, Philip. I was excited, distracted when I first heard of it. Did I offend you, Philip, with what I said?'

'My dear child,' he said, 'you could not offend me, if you tried. There was some pretty fire under your eyelashes, and you spoke with the vehemence of a small Amazon; but I knew you meant nothing. You cannot quarrel with me, Violet, for I

won't quarrel with you. And about this mad resolve of Cecil — it is very unfortunate; but you are not to blame. He ought to have declared his affection frankly, and asked you whether you were engaged.'

'There,' she said, with a pretty pout, 'you are going on the assumption that I wished him to do so. How do I know that he had any affection to declare?'

'Violet!'

'Well, at all events,' she said, with a toss of her head, although she blushed all the same, 'you seem to take for granted that I am vexed at losing a lover. It is too bad of you, Philip; I have already told you that I should be glad to see Lord Cecil back, if I were never to speak to him again. I feel guilty about his leaving—that is all. I liked him very well, of course; who could help it?'

'Who could help it, indeed!' said Philip honestly. 'He was the best friend I have ever had — a man as true as steel, who seemed to have no idea even of tampering with his conscience in the smallest trifle.

But why speak of him in the past tense, Violet? To leave England is not to leave life; it is possible to meet again in the world a man who has gone to America.'

'Ten years,' she said, rather sadly. 'Where shall we all be in ten years?'

'In ten years?' said Philip more cheerfully. 'Cecil will be returning to England with a bronzed face and a trunkful of wealth. He will be the owner of innumerable mines, oil-springs, farms, and what not; he will have a hardened constitution and a head cleared of all old foibles and enthusiasms. He will step ashore, and his first words will be for you.'

'For me? I hope not,' said Violet;—'that would be worse than his going away. And you forget that he cannot acquire this wealth you speak of; the lands and property of the society are to be held in common.'

'The society will break up in six months.'

'It may,' said Violet thoughtfully. 'But he will not return, I know. I think he

wants to forget all about England in these ten years; it will be better if he can.'

'Why did he not tell me he was going?' said Philip suddenly.

'Why?'

'Because I should have gone with him.'

'You!'

'Yes; why not? Have not I something to forget?'

Violet was silent. Philip never spoke of that bygone misfortune; and now, even this brief recollection of it seemed to have disturbed him greatly; and she knew not what to say.

'Why are you not honest with me, Violet?' he said, in a moment or two. 'Why do you try to conceal the affection you have for Cecil? I saw it in every line of your face, every look of your eyes; and yet you try to hide it. I should be able to console you rather better if you were to tell me honestly that the only man you cared for had gone away from England, and that you were not likely ever to see him again. Is not that true?'

'O, Philip,' she cried, with the tears starting to her eyes, 'how can I tell you? But you know it all; you know how miserable I am, in spite of myself. I try to think it is nothing; I try to shame myself into forgetting my wretchedness. I have no right to think of him; he never told me he cared for me. But it is all over now—all over.'

He took her hand in his, and said, with a laugh that sounded strangely,

'Don't you think the best thing you and I can do is to marry in real earnest? Why not humour the bent that all these events are taking? Why not let us get to the climax at once, and see what is in store for us in life?'

She drew away her hand.

'You frighten me, Philip,' she said. 'What do you mean? Do you mean that we are both so miserable, that we should join our ill fortunes, and laugh at destiny?'

'Destiny is laughing at us,' he said gloomily. 'She has had the laugh on her side for ever so long; but perhaps we are

no worse off than other people, if we only knew.'

Here Mrs. Drem entered the room.

'Surely you young people have had your confidences interchanged by this time.'

She saw at once, however, that something had occurred; and instantly surmised, from the expression of Philip's face, that Lilian had been mentioned between them.

'I have heard some news,' she said, pretending to see nothing. 'Lord Cecil Sidmouth sailed for America yesterday, without saying a word to any of his acquaintances. Did you know?'

'Yes, Mrs. Drem, I knew,' said Violet; 'and I came to tell Philip.'

Mrs. Drem glanced from one to the other of them, and then observed the letter lying open on the table.

'What was the reason of his going so suddenly?' she asked.

'You may read his letter, if you please,' said Violet calmly, giving her the closely-written sheets.

'Dear me, it is so long,' said Mrs. Drem. 'I should be detaining you.—Will you take Violet out for a drive, Philip? and she may have the letter when she returns.—And will you stay and dine with us this evening, my dear? We are all by ourselves.'

Philip laughed; Violet blushed; Mrs. Drem looked rather uncomfortable.

'Come along, Violet,' he said. 'If people *will* say we are engaged, we may as well enjoy the freedom of the supposition. My phaeton is at the door. Won't you come?'

'Yes, go, my dear,' said Mrs. Drem, kissing her.

And so, before she knew what she was about, Violet was hurried down-stairs and into the phaeton.

'You look rather uncomfortable,' said Philip, as he took the reins in his hand; for, whatever companionship they had enjoyed before, they had never gone the length of driving by themselves in the Park.

'I am getting to be resigned,' said Violet.

The very first people they saw in the Park were the Delaneys and Miss Thormanby, who all stared with sufficient surprise.

'I wish we had not come,' said Violet. 'What will they all think?'

'Only what they thought before,' said Philip. 'We cannot be any worse.'

'But now we give them occasion to talk.'

'So we did before.'

'Well, it does not matter.'

'As you say, it does not matter, Violet. And so soon as my father gets Sir James out of his difficulties, then we shall find some means of getting out of this predicament, and you will be free again.'

'Yes; free again,' repeated Violet with a sigh.

What object had she now in being free? To be free was to be marriageable; and she did not wish to marry any one.

'You will gain for yourself a bad reputation, Philip,' she said. 'They will re-

member your breaking off your engagement with Mary Thormanby; and now this second one with me.'

'I cannot help it,' said Philip. 'There was no engagement in either case. Besides, engagements are only tests, after all; and if a man finds it would be better for him not to marry the girl, after discovering more of her character—'

'He ought to have discovered before,' said Violet.

'Then let him pay for his laziness and go.'

Presently they saw Sir James Kingscote, with another gentleman, crossing over from the Albert-gate.

'O, there is papa!' cried Violet in affright, 'along with Colonel Paterson. What shall we do?'

'Stop and speak to them, of course,' said Philip, suiting the action to the word.

Sir James looked surprised—not displeased.

'Mrs. Drem wishes me to stay and dine with her this evening, papa,' said Violet,

with another stupendous blush. She felt as if the Drem family had already caught hold of her, and were dragging her from her own home.

'Very well, my dear,' said Sir James; 'it is an excellent arrangement; for I must dine with Colonel Paterson, it seems. I will send the brougham for you at ten.'

So they drove on again.

'He too surrenders you to your fate,' said Philip with a smile.

'Yes,' she said with another sigh.

CHAPTER VI.

'FRA DIAVOLO.'

It seemed as though they were destined on that afternoon to meet all their mutual acquaintances; and amongst the first of these was Mr. Stanberry, whom Philip had not seen since he had been at Torquay. Mr. Stanberry was in an excellent humour; for he had carried an important amendment in the House the night before, he had won the second prize at a pigeon-shooting match that morning, and he was to dine in the evening at a house where he expected to meet the Prime Minister. Philip pulled up by the railings; and Mr. Stanberry shook hands with him, and took off his hat to Miss Violet, whom he knew slightly.

'Haven't seen you for a year,' he said; 'not since we were at Torquay. How is

that young lady who was there with her guardian — Miss Seaford, was that her name?'

'She's very well,' said Philip curtly.

And Mr. Stanberry glanced at Violet, and held his peace on that subject.

'Look here,' he said. 'I took a box for this evening at Covent Garden for my daughters; but I can't go, and neither can they. Can you make use of it?'

Philip turned to Violet.

'Will you go? I can drive you home presently. You can dress at your leisure, come up to dinner, and we shall make a party of three or four.'

'We could not do better,' said Violet promptly.

So Mr. Stanberry was thanked for his box; and Violet was driven home. In due course she appeared at Mrs. Drem's dinner-table; and then it was arranged that Mrs. Drem should accompany them to the opera.

But Violet's observant eyes had already remarked some constraint in the manner of Philip and his stepmother, and suspected

that something had occurred in the interval between Philip's return home and her arrival. She was right in her conjecture. Something very important had occurred. Her father, on leaving the young people in the Park, had gone straight up to Mr. Drem's house, in the gayest of moods. After what he had seen, he thought he was safe in claiming the aid which Mr. Drem had promised him; and he accordingly made arrangements to rejoin Colonel Paterson, doubting not that, when they met at dinner, he, Sir James, would be a saved and happy man.

'When they are married, Sir James,' said Richard Drem briefly, 'I shall be happy to advance you the money.'

'This is too much of a bargain,' said the other, flushing haughtily.

'I cannot help it,' said Mr. Drem. 'I am a man of business. I don't lend money on bad security; neither do I give it away for nothing.'

Sir James rose.

'I can understand plain-speaking,' he

said; 'but this seems to me intentional insult.'

'It is nothing of the kind,' said Richard Drem doggedly; 'it is only common sense. You'll be a fool if you take it any other way than it's meant. You won't get the same chance again; and, as far as I see, the young people are likely to marry independently of our affairs.'

'Then why drag my daughter into it in this way?' said Sir James. 'If they mean to marry, good and well; I have no objection. On the contrary, I could not wish her to get a better husband. Philip is a gentlemanly young man, thoroughly to be trusted, and certain to be an honourable man through his life.'

'Ah, you say right—you say right!' exclaimed Richard Drem. 'I have spared no expense in bringing him up—none. You wouldn't believe what that boy has cost me; and I don't regret it. At present I give him 3000*l.* a year—3000*l.* a year. So that if your daughter is valuable in your eyes—'

'Mr. Drem,' said Sir James, with some severity, 'once for all, I will not have my daughter put into scales and weighed. If we are to transact this piece of business, it must be between ourselves. I will not have her dragged into it. Confound it!' added the tall baronet, with a flush of vexation and anger, 'I would rather sell every stick and stone in my house than insult my own daughter in this fashion!'

'You are a hasty man; you are a man of hasty temper,' said Richard Drem, with a gravity which at another moment would have made Sir James roar with laughter. 'You are only harming yourself with your hasty temper. If you like, you can leave your daughter out of the question altogether. Call it by any name you like. I will lend you the money, or give you the money, without any reference to the marriage; *but after the marriage has taken place.*'

'I cannot wait,' said Sir James.

'I can,' said Mr. Drem.

'Isn't it sufficient for you to see that

they are as good as engaged—that they *must* marry?'

'No; it is not sufficient. I am a cautious man. The money is at your disposal — so soon as they marry. Get your daughter to encourage Philip to marry her.'

'I will not, by God!' cried Sir James. 'I am not sunk so low as that. I have tampered with the honour of my family long enough. Her mother would rise out of her grave to save the child from being degraded farther. I can afford to be ruined; I cannot afford to let my daughter demean herself. Good-day to you.'

Before Mr. Drem could recover from his surprise, Sir James had left the room and gone out of the house.

'He makes wry faces at the first spoonful; but he'll swallow the whole of it yet,' said the great merchant with a contemptuous grin.

Then he called his wife, and told her the whole story.

'You should have let him have the

money, Richard,' said Mrs. Drem thoughtfully. 'He will break off the marriage now.'

'He will ruin himself, if he does.'

'But he is too proud to care. You must have offended him by your way of putting it. He was quite cheerful when he came; he did not even stay to bid me good-evening as he went down-stairs.'

'If his stomach is so proud as that,' said Richard Drem, 'he'd better learn to starve it.'

When Philip came in, his stepmother apprised him of all that had happened.

'You know the way your father has of talking,' she said. 'He must have insulted Sir James. And now, what is to be done? Think of Sir James becoming a bankrupt; of Margery Home being sold; of Violet and him having to live in obscure lodgings, perhaps in extreme want. It would break her heart to part with Margery Home. She is fonder of it, and prouder of it, even than her father is. Think of their becoming beggars, Philip!'

'There is no need for anything of the kind,' said Philip calmly. 'I will marry her if she likes.'

'You will?' cried Mrs. Drem with sudden joy.

'Yes,' said Philip; 'I don't see that I can do anything better.'

'You will get a charming wife—such a charming wife!' exclaimed Mrs. Drem in delight. 'You will be very happy, Philip—both of you. You have known each other so long; and Violet is such a darling creature. O, my dear, I am quite anxious you should settle the matter at once. Would you prefer going to the opera alone?'

Philip laughed.

'Would you like to see a poor girl cabined up in a box, with no escape from the man who wants to marry her? What if she says No? Wouldn't it be a charming performance afterwards? Or shall I ask her just before the curtain falls?'

'She cannot say No; she must say Yes,' cried Mrs. Drem. 'Do you know, Philip,

you have made me as happy as both of you will be yourselves, I am sure. And I will go or not, just as you please.'

'Of course you must go with us,' said Philip; and she went.

The opera was *Fra Diavolo*. When Violet—who was dressed pretty nearly all in white, with pearls and a red rose in her black hair—took her seat, Zerlina was just coming forward to sing the Diavolo song, while the gentlemanly bandit sat and listened to her. The pretty servant-maid was no other than Pauline Lucca, of the shining eyes and thrush-like voice; and the great audience applauded the song so, that she had to sing it over again, and then the stage was left to the dramatic business among the brigands.

Mr. Philip chose this interval to tell Violet, in very guarded terms, what had occurred between his father and Sir James. Mrs. Drem sat and busied herself so with the stage, that she apparently heard nothing; while Violet, whose chair was drawn back from the front of the box, listened

with an expression of alarm and pain on her face.

'*Per rimirar la bella*,' sang the brigand on the stage, quite unheeded.

'What are we to do?' said Violet. 'If papa is offended, he will sell Margery Home rather than beg anything from Mr. Drem. And I know it must have been on my account that he was hurt—he would not mind for himself. And think of his giving up the old house he is so proud of, Philip. It would break his heart. What is to be done—what can we do?'

'Well, Violet,' said he, 'there is one easy remedy for all this trouble—and perhaps it is the best thing you and I can do now.'

She looked at him with a quick glance of inquiry and surprise, and a faint colour overspread her face. Zerlina was at this moment taking the money that was to be her wedding-portion, and her soldier-lover was crying with all his might, '*E posso domandare la tua mano a tuo padre?*'

'Why should we not marry, Violet?'

he said calmly. 'We should live very happily together, I think.'

'O, Philip!' she said, 'how very generous of you! It is only for my sake you make the offer—I know it is.'

'And you accept it?'

'*Vittoria! vittoria!*' sang the soldiers on the stage—bringing the first act to a conclusion, and producing a dead silence in the box. For they dared not speak now, or Mrs. Drem would overhear.

'How pretty she is, and how charmingly she sings!' said Mrs. Drem.

'Yes,' said Violet, rather absently.

Mrs. Drem pretended not to see any anxiety or constraint in the girl's face, and chattered on lightly until the curtain rose again and disclosed Zerlina's sleeping apartment.

'You know what I have to offer you Violet,' said Philip, in an undertone. 'And I know what you have to give. But people have married, and have lived very happily, who were merely drawn towards each other by great personal esteem and liking. We

must both of us make the past a sealed book, and lay it by—tenderly enough, perhaps—that won't matter. We cannot do better, Violet. You will save your father's credit—you will keep the old house—and you will satisfy everybody concerned. What do you say?'

'*Sì, domani, sì, domani*,' sang the pretty Zerlina, as she undressed herself before the mirror, and thought of her marriage on the morrow.

'It is so kind of you, Philip, to make it appear that you are anxious for the marriage, when I know you only pretend to be, to make it easy for me to accept.'

'Hush! You must not say such things!' he said, with a smile. 'Do you think so little of yourself?'

'*Questa vita, ad una serva!*' sang Zerlina, as if she were lending them a lyrical accompaniment to their whispered talk.

'Philip,' said Violet, 'you will see how grateful I shall be to you for your goodness. You will not regret it—if I can help it. I shall never forget what you have done

for my father and myself—and I will try to repay you for your goodness.'

'Then that is settled,' said he; while Zerlina, on the stage, was drawing the curtains around her and singing,

'O Vergine santa, in cui ho fede,
Pregate per lui, pregate per me.'

Mrs. Drem turned at this juncture to see why they paid no attention to what was going on, and so they were forced to occupy themselves with the scene. You know that after Zerlina has retired to rest, praying for her lover, and thinking of the ceremony of the following day, her happiness is rudely interrupted. Lorenzo and his soldiers return, the brigand is discovered in her chamber, and the act closes in a tempest of indignation, and anger, and grief.

'Poor Zerlina!' said Violet.

'But she will be married by and by,' said Mrs. Drem, with a kindly smile.

Violet glanced to see whether there was any hint in the words of Mrs. Drem having overheard what they had been talking

about; but the pretty fair face was quite calm and assured, and the gray eyes told nothing.

'Let us go and have a promenade in the saloon,' said Philip, 'and fancy ourselves at La Scala.'

'It will take a good deal of fancy, my dear,' said Mrs. Drem mildly.

They went, nevertheless; and had some ices at one of the small tables, and then returned to their box. All during the last act they paid rather more attention to the opera than they had done; and when at last, Zerlina's troubles and griefs being all over, the curtain came down on a crowd of rejoicing villagers, Philip said to his stepmother,

'I suppose Zerlina and Lorenzo get married to-morrow.'

'I suppose so,' said Mrs. Drem.

'I think you may as well ask Violet now when she and I are to be married.'

Mrs. Drem, instead of betraying any surprise, took Violet by both her hands and affectionately kissed her on the cheek.

CHAPTER VII.

OVER TOR BAY.

THE small world of London imitates in one way that progressive movement of attraction and repulsion which reigns throughout the universe, and is either making new suns or splitting them up. For a certain time the people of these realms converge to the great centre, until it swells and bursts, and sends them flying into all corners of the globe. But there are many who cannot wait for the autumn scattering. When the sunlight lies sleepily on the lilac-trees and limes of the squares—when the parks are trodden gray and dry—when the water-carts cannot keep the streets moist—when people's houses are a turmoil of visitors during the day and a sweltering cram at night—one gasps for air, and instinctively

turns to the south, where the cool sea lies far off around breezy headlands. It is impossible to wait for the great centrifugal stampede, which will, perhaps, carry one to the equally hot streets of Florence, or the burning shores of Constanz, or the stifling galleries of Dresden and Vienna. Down in the south of England there are cunning nooks where the sea is green and clear, where the shingle is cold and white, and there are light winds playing about the shadows of the rocky cliffs. These nooks are not to be found in the blank and bare monotony of the chalk line, where the air is full of white fire reflected from the cliffs, and even bird-life seems to have been burnt out of the scant and dusty bushes. They are to be found where the coast is jagged and dark—where there are hidden coves smothered in green foliage — where the small boats, lying out in the sunlight, seem held in the air, so clear and shining is the deep water beneath.

Mr. Philip said to himself,

'I must have one last look at Torquay

by myself, for I will never take Violet there.'

So, with some more or less pertinent excuse, he slipped out of his town circle, and made straight down for Devonshire. He did not know that Lilian was there, or he would not have gone. He wished merely to have a farewell ramble about the old places which he knew so well, which he might never see again; for he felt that he could not bear to take his wife there.

It was an unhappy chance that brought them together; for what was the use of renewing the sharp and bitter pain that was past? Both of them were trying to forget. He had never sought to see her, even, after the marriage. He had carefully avoided going near Hampstead. He had sent her no message, no token that he was alive; and, so far as he was concerned, she might have been dead. They never met once—they took every precaution to let the past die out. They did everything that a prudent and practical world would have coun-

selled them to do; but neither of them any the more succeeded in forgetting.

Philip did not stop at Torquay on his downward journey. He went straight on to Totnes, and put up at the inn at which they had stayed, and rambled about the neighbourhood, and took one walk down by the river-side.

'She said we two should never be here again together,' he said to himself, 'and I laughed at her anxious face. What if I were to see her now—and she were to come walking along the bank there?'

Such an encounter was more possible than he fancied; but it did not take place. On the contrary, he met no one. The spring visitors to Torquay had all left for London—at least such of them as were not detained by illness—and there were no more parties of tourists coming to see the river.

Next day he sailed down the Dart; and the woods now were heavy with foliage, and the meadows a deep velvet-green with their long grass and its white-and-

yellow stars. All about Dartmouth, too, the summer flowers were in bloom; and as you passed garden-walls, there was an odour of honeysuckle or sweet-brier in the warm air. He went down to the small church at the point—that, and the great blue sea that lay along the line of the sky, were the only things which had not changed. Dartmouth looked quite a different town now; but the sea was the same sea that he and Lilian had looked at together. It was here that she had turned away quickly from the great expanse of blue, and put her hands over her eyes, and found that she could carry up to London a picture of the sea that she loved.

'Does she ever look at it now?' he said, as he sat down on a bit of the old castle, overlooking the steep rocks and the water. 'Does she ever think of Torquay? and is the memory of it as pleasant as she used to say it would be? If I had never seen Torquay, I should have found life more bearable.'

Indeed, he scarcely dared venture thi-

ther. When he drew near, on the next day, the three hills and their white villas and trees, it was with a strange sort of apprehension. He felt that he could scarce bear to look again at the pleasant places that were once so familiar to them. Nevertheless he went to the same hotel at which they had stayed, and hired the same rooms.

The waiters thought it rather odd that a single gentleman should want a big sitting-room—which he used very seldom, and which was costly. But cost was not a matter of much consequence to him; and he kept the room. When he first entered it, he had gone straight to the window. In a corner of one of the panes—so small as scarcely to be visible—he found the letters 'L. S.' inscribed on the glass—he had scrawled them there in a listless fit on the evening before they left.

There now interposed between them but the breadth of a small town, and neither knew it. Two days he spent there, driving about to places in the neighbourhood, or lounging on foot round the rocky shore;

but he and Lilian had never met. On the third day, however, he had gone up to the top of Flagstaff-hill, and seated himself on one of the benches there. He had a book in his hand. It was a volume which Lilian had got from the library when they were down there, and which she had been wicked enough to use—as she used most books, of whatever sanctity—for the pressing of wild flowers as they walked along. Philip remembered the name of this book—sent for it to the library—purchased it from the librarian, and had now walked up here to turn over the leaves.

There, sure enough, were the faint stains that had been left by the wild flowers—a tinge of pink or purple, as the case might be, with the outline of the stalk and the blossom indicated. How well he remembered the dingy yellow leaves of this book, in which she used to deposit these treasures, despite his remonstrances! He attached a romantic interest to the dull brown cover—it had many a time been pressed by her hand.

On the top of this windy hill, with the great curve of the bay running out into the sea down there in the south, and with the far coast stretching eastward until it was lost in the white mist of the sky, he thought he was quite alone. He sat and dreamed there, with the book on his knee, of those brief sweet days of his last sojourn in this place; and then he rose to go away, sick at heart.

He saw Lilian coming towards him; and a giddiness came over him. She did not see him — she might not see him at all, if she only changed the direction of her steps somewhat, and went to another seat. She was looking far out to sea as she walked along, and seemed quite unaware of his presence.

Nor did she see him. The graceful figure, dressed all in black, passed on; and the girl sat down on a seat near the edge of the rocks, and opened a book that she carried, though she gazed out on the sea, and not on its pages. How beautiful she looked, his darling of old, with the sun-

light on the splendour of her brown hair! But her face was dreadfully pale, and there was a sunken look about the sad eyes which touched him keenly. Had it not been for that, I think he would have gone away, and spared her the pain of the meeting; but looking at the misery of her eyes, his heart yearned to go and say a kindly word to her. What harm could there be in it? Let them meet as friends merely; but he could not help going to look into the sad face of his old love once more.

She started up from her seat with a slight cry, as if it was his spectre that had approached her, and regarded him with fear and apprehension.

'Won't you speak to me, Lilian?' he said. 'May we not speak to each other?'

She looked at him, and the tears welled-up in her eyes.

'I cannot be unkind to you, Philip; but—but you must go away. Why did you come? Have we not suffered enough? Why did you come and make it worse?'

'I did not seek you, Lilian,' he said. 'I did not know you were here. We have met by a pure accident—why should we go away from each other like strangers?'

'We need not do that,' she said, with a sad smile, for his words had reassured her. 'Sit down and let us talk a little; then you will go away—from Torquay I mean, or I will go. For we must not meet, Philip.'

'You have not been well, Lilian,' he said, looking at her.

He was trembling in every limb. She, on the contrary, so soon as she knew that their meeting was an accident, seemed quite calm and satisfied.

'It does not matter much now,' she said, with the same strange sad smile on her face, and a kindly light in her eyes. 'I have no one to order me about, and make me keep well, as you used to do, Philip. And so you have come down to Torquay? It is very pretty now, is it not? Are you all alone, Philip?'

'How can you talk like that, Lilian?'

he cried. 'You are trying to look cheerful, and your heart is breaking. My darling, my darling! you are killing yourself; and I am standing by helpless, as if I had never been your friend, and could do nothing for you. But see now, Lilian: I will take you away from this country altogether —we will go away from England, and my little girl will grow merry again, and be glad! You are looking so old, Lilian—so worn! I did not know. But see now, my darling, we will go away from England altogether, and you will grow young again, and you will learn to laugh!'

The tears were running down his cheeks as he spoke, and he had caught both her hands in his. She gently released herself and rose, and stood at a little distance, quite calm.

'I cannot be angry with you, Philip—you know I never could be angry with you —but you don't know what you say. You ask me to go away with you to another country—should I be your wife there, Philip?'

He could not answer; and she continued in the same gentle voice,

'I cannot be angry with you, Philip—I know what you suffer, my poor boy—you do not know what you say. But if I am to speak any more to you now, you must not mention that again. And perhaps we shall not have another chance of talking together.'

'Sit down, Lilian,' he said. 'I will say no more about it—there is an angel looking out of your eyes, and you know what is right. I do not. I think the world is all wrong; and we are blundering about what is wickedness, and what is not wickedness, when our own hearts tell us that these laws are monstrous. I say there is no sin in our going away together—the sin lay in these Lawsons telling you you ought to keep a ridiculous oath—'

'Hush, Philip!' she said. 'That is all past now. We must take our life as we find it. There are people far worse off than we are. We have kindly friends, and no difficult work to accomplish. Look at

our being here now, in circumstances that thousands would think inconceivably fortunate and happy.'

'You have grown very wise, Lilian,' he said; 'but all this pleasant life has not kept your cheek from being thin and wasted, and you will have gray hair long before your time.'

'I hope I shall never have gray hair,' she said, rather sadly.

'You mean that you wish to die,' he said; 'and yet you ask me to be thankful for our lives.'

'You are a man,' she said. 'You have an active life before you. You have plenty to occupy yourself with; and you must forget all these old dreams. Philip,' she added suddenly, 'is it true that you are going to get married?'

'What would you say, if I were to answer yes?'

'I would say, that I was very glad,' she said, with her frank honest eyes looking up into his face.

'That is like your noble and generous

heart. But I must tell you all about it,' he added, rather shamefacedly; 'for I would not have you think that I could change so lightly, and wish to marry only for my own sake.'

So he began, and told her of all the complicated circumstances which surrounded the proposed marriage. Lilian listened very attentively all through.

'I am very glad, Philip,' she said, with a kindly smile. 'But you must not think that an apology is necessary. You must not marry her thinking you are doing anything wrong. It is what you ought to do; and many a year afterwards, if she is what you say she is, you will be glad. If you like her so well, and if you admire her so much, you will become very fond of her, I know.'

She uttered a slight sigh as she finished the words. Her eyes were looking out towards the sea—towards the point of Berry Head, round which they had sailed in the old bygone time. Her thoughts had reverted to that period, and to the dreams she had then permitted herself to dream,

that some day she might perhaps be to Philip what she now hoped Violet Kingscote would be. It was heartbreaking to him to see the pathetic wistfulness of her eyes and the calm sadness of her face. It was the face of a woman now, no longer that of a girl; and he could not somehow help associating it with gray hair and the bitterness of a wasted life.

The purity and resignation of that face had its effect upon him. He dared no more propose that she should burst the bonds that held her, and fly from England with him. There was in reality 'an angel looking out of her eyes;' and he sat and wondered what the end should be — if this beautiful frail young life were slowly to die away before his gaze, and leave the earth emptied of its rarest loveliness.

Then she rose.

'I did not think I could have met you, and talked to you so calmly,' she said. 'But I have so often thought that we might meet, that it was scarcely a surprise. Now you will say good-bye; and we must not

see each other again for many years. Then you will let me see your wife, Philip; and perhaps there would be no harm then in my becoming her friend—if so grand a lady would care to speak to me, and if you yourself have not forgotten me.'

'Forgotten you, Lilian!'

'Ah, no, you will not forget me, Philip; I know you too well to fear that,' she said. 'And if anything should happen to me soon, and your wife would come with you to see me—'

'O, Lilian, what do you mean!' he cried in despair. 'I will not leave you like this! I will not leave you! I will stay and watch over you until you have got better. My darling, you are dying of this misery! I will not go away from you any more!'

'Hush!' she said gently. 'You must go away, Philip; and now I am not very ill. This air will make me quite strong; and you must not think of me at all. You must go away up to London at once.'

Then she took his hand and looked up into his face.

'I am not sorry I ever met you, Philip,' she said. 'You are the best man I have known; and I have faith in you. You will be a good man all your life, and a good husband to her. Good-bye, now—and do not be too sad-hearted.'

She raised his hand to her lips and kissed it gently, and went away. He sat down on the bench that she had just quitted, and covered his face and wept like a child.

CHAPTER VIII.

SOONER OR LATER.

EVENTS were meanwhile hurrying to a climax of some sort or other with Samuel Hickes. His conduct at this time was that of a madman, marked by wild fits of passion and dissipation, which rendered him quite a picturesque object in the eyes of the small crowd of parasites whom he had attracted round him. His money was rapidly disappearing; and he seemed anxious to squander it outright. One day he would be in deep dejection, wandering round Hampstead and Highgate, as if longing merely to catch a glimpse of his wife from a distance; the next day he would be the reckless leader and prince of a band of dingy reprobates, endeavouring to madden or stupefy himself with drink, and not very often succeeding.

At last he said to one of his companions —a needy Frenchman whom he had met in a billiard-room:

'I want you to write an announcement of my death.'

'*Farceur!*' said his friend.

'I am in earnest, Fourvelle; I am indeed. You know the story of my marriage?'

'You tell it to every one each day,' said the Frenchman.

'But do you know the particulars? It doesn't matter. All I say is this: the longer I stay in England, the more likely I am to kill myself. I am not going to kill myself for any woman. Fourvelle, if you only saw her—'

'Ah, I know!' said his companion. 'What is this about your death?'

'I am going to put matters straight. I have no chance of winning her affection—and I am getting madder about her every day; and if I stay in England, I will kill myself and her both. I want to release her. I have done her an injury; I will

make it up to her. You write me now an announcement of my death.'

'I do not understand.'

'Suppose that we two are in Brussels—that I die—that you write home to tell her. Don't you see? Then I go to Brussels—post the letter there—disappear anywhere; and she is free to do what she likes. Isn't that acting fairly to her?' he added suddenly, with something resembling a sob.

'O, very fair!' said the small green-cheeked dingy person, as he rolled up a cigarette. 'Very fair; only she will never have the chance to thank you, and you will not get credit for your good-will to her.'

'I don't care,' said Hickes doggedly. 'You write the announcement.'

They were in an obscure dirty little coffee-house in Soho. They called for some paper and ink; and his companion began to write:

'*Madame, j'ai la douleur de vous faire part de la mort de monsieur votre mari.*'

'That is too formal,' said Hickes angrily,

as the Frenchman read out line by line in English. 'You must make it appear you are in the room with the corpse, and describe what you see.'

'What a ferocious comedy!' said the other, with a baboon-like grin.

In due time they had concocted between them a dramatic and pathetic letter descriptive of Hickes's death. The professional skill of the quondam playwright was brought in to supply the most truthful-like details, while Fourvelle translated the whole into lofty and emotional French sentences.

'You laugh not at the joke,' said he to Hickes, who was sitting very gloomy and silent.

'I wish it was no joke; I wish it was true.'

'My faith!' said the other, 'I did not think an Englishman able to conceive such a grand passion. But you do not go right about it. She is your wife; you should go up to the house, and if she behave bad to you—if she will not see you nor speak—

then you kill yourself and her, and make a story for the newspapers.'

'I don't want to kill anybody,' said Hickes impatiently. 'I wish you Frenchmen had some sense.'

'I think it is the English who want that,' said Hickes's friend, with a polite smile. 'You English never get into a passion about anything but your wives. You care nothing for politics, for art, for nothing but your wives.'

'And you French care for nothing but revolutions,' said Hickes scornfully, 'and barricades—revolutions and barricades. If a Frenchman were to be dropped into a desert, the first thing he'd do would be to look round for stuff to make a barricade with, just as if he was an animal going to build its nest. Have you finished that letter?'

'You need not talk so loud—yes, there is the letter. Now, what is the address?'

'I won't have *you* address it,' said Hickes. 'You'd go and tell her all about it for sixpence.'

The small Frenchman started from his

seat, and, with a face that was greener than usual with passion, demanded to know what Hickes meant. The keeper of the coffee-house, hearing their raised voices, accompanied by a good many oaths in both languages, rushed forward to pacify them; and at length Fourvelle consented to believe that his companion did not know what he had been saying. Hickes, nevertheless, was in no very good temper when he left the place, in order to go to Hampstead.

'I'll have it out with the whole of them,' he said, clenching his teeth. 'They think I'm a feeble weak-minded wretch whom they can twist round their finger. They'll see. She is my wife. Any other man would have knocked the house about their ears, and blackened her eyes by this time. I have been too gentle with them. I am too simple; but now they will see if I haven't as much determination as anybody else.'

'Why you make such a fuss about a woman?' said Fourvelle, who had walked out with him. 'There are lots more.'

'You don't understand a man raving about his own wife in your country,' said Hickes bitterly. 'If it was anybody else's wife, I suppose you would.'

'I have a good story about that,' said Fourvelle, who let his country shift for itself. 'There was a Chinaman—'

'I don't want to hear it,' said Hickes sulkily; 'I want to go on alone.'

The small Frenchman stopped and stared; then lifted his hat and turned away. Presently, however, he came back to Hickes, and said stiffly,

'You promised to lend me half-a-crown.'

'There's half-a-sovereign. Are you satisfied?'

'Mr. Hickes, I take my oath I will pay you like a man of honour; I will pay you before Monday next.'

'You won't; nor after Monday next,' said Hickes contemptuously. 'What's the use of telling lies?'

Again the Frenchman lifted his hat, said nothing in reply, and walked away,

having put the half-sovereign into his waistcoat-pocket.

'These are the sort of men I have got among,' said Hickes to himself, as he got on the outside of the Hampstead omnibus. 'Leeches! It is all the polite society I can get for my money.'

So he fell to reviewing his position, from the moment that he had consented to adopt Arthur Drem's suggestion on till the present time. He came to the conclusion that he was an ill-used man—the sport of circumstances which were unusually cruel; and, most of all, the victim of her who ought to have helped him along in life.

'If she had liked, she might have made a very different man of me. I don't complain. I have never said a word about her selfishness; her going on from day to day thinking of that old sweetheart of hers who is as good as dead—and forgetting me, who ought to be uppermost in her thoughts. It isn't my fault that I have got among these people — that I have spent three-fourths of the money—that I have been

drinking in that way. I have never been encouraged. Other people had friends and relatives to back them and help them; I have been alone. She who ought to have helped me won't look at me; and yet I daresay she'd pretend to be precious shocked if she knew how I've been going on. But that was nothing to what will be, if she won't listen to me. If she does turn me away from her door like a beggar, I'll enjoy myself my own way. I'll have a merry life while it lasts. God knows, it hasn't been very merry of late.'

This he said with a sigh, which was followed by a careless laugh.

'Conductor,' said he, 'when you stop at Chalk-farm, you and I'll have a bottle of champagne.'

'All right, sir.'

'You don't believe me? There, look at that half-sovereign! Will you believe that?'

The conductor took the half-sovereign.

'You ain't jokin', sir?'

'Either have it or do without it!' said

Hickes sulkily. 'I tell you to get a bottle of champagne. I give you the money. If you're not satisfied, I'll have the half-sovereign back.'

The conductor, however, was in no hurry to return the money. It was not every day he met with such a chance; and if his 'fare' were an escaped lunatic—and there were several peculiarities about his appearance—at least the money was good.

Hickes drank nearly a tumblerful of champagne, and became very red in the face. It did not improve his spirits, however; on the contrary, he became more and more morose, until, by the time he had reached Hampstead, the conductor had given up the attempt to speak to him.

'He ain't accustomed to swells' drink,' the conductor remarked to the driver, as Hickes went down the road. 'That 'ere stuff has soured on his stomach.'

He was surprised to find a chain and padlock on the small gate leading into James Lawson's front garden. He looked up at the windows of the house—the shut-

ters were all closed. Clearly there was no one within.

There were some people standing in the next garden, and they looked at him.

'Can you tell me where the people who stayed in this house have gone?'

'To Torquay, I think,' said one of the group.

'Torquay!' said Hickes. 'Thank you.' And then he turned and walked down the road.

Presently he walked sharply back to the people.

'Can you tell me why they have left?'

'Miss Seaford was unwell,' was the reply.

'So she still calls herself Miss Seaford,' Hickes muttered to himself as he left; 'and so do these people—just as if she never was married, and as if I wasn't alive. Ill, too, and gone out of London without a word. This is how I am placed. Last year everything was to be so fine and pleasant. We were to live in a house near the river about Twickenham or Kingston; I was to write

my plays in peace and security, independent of managers, and doing my best in spite of them; I was to have a pretty young wife that everybody was to rave about; and the Drems were all to be very much obliged to me. Now it turns out that I am left by myself in London. I have spent nearly all my money, and insulted the manager of the Rotunda into the bargain; so that he won't look at anything I might send him. She won't even let me see her, and is off with her own people into the country. Here am I, turned out without a human being to speak to, and it's going to rain. It's all her fault; and if the worst comes to the worst, it is she who is to blame, not me.'

In his present reckless mood he would have been glad of the society of any tramp or vagabond who would have gone into a public-house with him—he had picked up a good many of these acquaintances of late—but it suddenly occurred to him that he would go down to Arthur Drem, and ask him what was the meaning of the Lawsons leaving London.

'He is sure to know; he is like the devil, and knows everything,' said Hickes, as he made his way down to the station of the North-London Railway. How well he remembered going down that road one Sunday evening long ago!

'And it has all come to this,' he complained to himself. 'Nobody has got any good out of it except these Drems. I daresay they are all laughing at me now, confound them!'

After he had got into the carriage, he drew out the letter that Fourvelle had written, and read it with a look of imbecile melancholy on his face. He did not understand French very well, although he was a dramatic author; and it was only here and there that he caught the sense of the rhetorical periods descriptive of his own deathbed.

'*In a land of strangers, madam, he died with your name on his lips, true to the last to the woman whom he adored above all the rest of her sex.*'

'There's more truth in that than Four-

velle, or any of these fellows, would believe,' said Hickes.

'*With his eyes directed upon a crucifix on the wall opposite him, and with your portrait, madam, pressed to his lips, he breathed his last; and there is now on his face a placid smile, which tells me that he died thinking of you, and blessing you for the light you threw on his worldly path.*'

'What will she think of that, I wonder?' thought Hickes. 'Will she be sorry at last? Who knows but that my wretched fate might at last touch her hard heart, and make her pity me? Then I might suddenly present myself, when she was in a contrite mood — no, it is impossible. She would never forgive me for having deceived her; and she will never know what I have done for her sake. I will shave-off my moustache and crop my hair close; I will go away to the ends of the earth and die in some fever-station—she will be just as if I had never seen her. Surely that will satisfy them all! and God knows I shall not be loath to get

out of this world. It's only a happy world for some people; and I'm sure I ain't one of them.'

His general grievance against the world gradually shaped itself, as it had often done before, into an indictment against Arthur Drem; and after he had drunk some brandy on the way, he was in no pleasant humour when he entered the Mincing-lane office, and rather loudly demanded to see his former companion and friend. Nor, indeed, was he a very respectable-looking person as he stood there; and the young-gentlemen clerks stared at this dingy and apparently tipsy young man, with the shabby clothes, the bleared blue eyes, and excited look, who insolently returned their stare, and seemed rather inclined to have a free fight with the whole of them.

Arthur Drem came quickly down the office—red and uncomfortable.

'What do you want?' he said angrily. 'I cannot see you now; I will see you by and by.'

'You will see me now — this minute,

if I choose,' said Hickes, who had summoned up a vast amount of spurious courage.

Just at this juncture Richard Drem came downstairs with his hat on, apparently about to go out. He heard the last words that were spoken, and was naturally astounded to hear such language in his office and in his presence.

'Who is this person?' he said severely; and all the clerks (who had turned their heads to their desks) were now in the full glow of expectation. Never in the memory of man had the serene atmosphere of Richard Drem's office trembled with such indications of a coming storm.

'If you don't know me, I know you,' said Hickes, directing his attack upon the head of the house. 'I am no more a "person" than you are. My name is Hickes—do you know me now?'

'I don't know you, sir,' said Richard Drem in a towering passion. 'Get out of this office!'

'Don't you provoke me,' said Hickes,

warming up in proportion. 'I came here peaceably disposed. I don't want to quarrel with anybody. But if I'm driven to it, I'll tell these gentlemen—servants of yours—what you are, and what I did for you; and I'll give ye a punch on the head to follow!'

'Mr. Mowbray!' shouted Mr. Drem, making a desperate effort to control himself, and looking as if an apoplectic stroke would have relieved him much, 'go at once for a constable.'

'Don't you be such a fool, Mowbray,' said Hickes.

Mr. Mowbray—the gentleman who, at the beginning of this story, was found sketching the profile of an actress on his blotting-paper—turned round from his desk and paused, looking very pale. He was a young man of no great stature, of slight frame; and he wore a very tight and prim costume, his tall and starched collar being particularly stiff, and lending a certain automatic precision to his motions.

He timidly ventured to open the swing-

ing-door in the low partition, and tried to get past Hickes.

'You are an ass, Mowbray!' said Hickes, catching him suddenly by the back of his stiff collar, and shoving him through the swinging-door again, by which means he was thrown somewhat forcibly against Richard Drem.

The disorganisation of Mr. Mowbray's collar and tie so upset that young gentleman, that he was completely helpless; but there now ensued a general movement on the part of the office to rush at Hickes and avenge their insulted companion. Mr. Drem was himself the leader; and Hickes had already put himself into fighting attitude, and dared him to come on, when Arthur Drem threw himself between them.

'Uncle,' he said, 'let me pacify this maniac.'

'I'll fight you both!' cried Hickes. 'I'll smash you both! I'll smash the whole of you!'

'Let me get at him, sir,' said one of

the young men, who had a reputation for his pugilistic skill, and had taken several lessons from a professor who keeps a public-house in Windmill-street.

With that he aimed a blow at Hickes over the partition, which was much more nearly catching Arthur Drem on the eye. For Arthur was now hustling and dragging his excited acquaintance out of the place; and no sooner had he succeeded in doing so, than he warmly remonstrated with him on the insanity of his conduct.

'Don't you see what you've done? My uncle would have given you anything you wanted, if you had approached him reasonably—'

'I don't want anything from you or him,' said Hickes. 'I've had enough of your money—and much good it has done! I want none of your money. I'm going abroad; and before I go, I'll have a flare-up with some of you.'

'Did you come down to have a flare-up just now?'

'No, I didn't. I was peaceably enough

disposed; but I won't be insulted by any counter-jumper among you.'

'Why, what a baby you are!' said Arthur. 'Are you inclined to be reasonable now? Will you stand me a dinner at the Green Dragon?'

'Yes, if you like,' said Hickes indifferently. 'I want to talk to you.'

Arthur went inside for his hat, and came out again. The two of them departed for the hostelry mentioned as if they were the best friends in the world, Hickes being merely a trifle sulky and gloomy. Arthur had really taken the surest means of subduing his temper, by talking as if nothing was the matter; and Hickes, who was pliable even in his most ferocious moods, had easily submitted, and was led like a captive lion round to Bishopsgate-street.

Here Hickes recovered some of his cheerfulness; and in a fit of bravado, to show that he had no commercial notions about money, ordered an extravagant dinner, and conducted himself gener-

ally as a weak person does who wishes to appear defiant and careless. He had fits of boastful braggadocio, followed by corresponding bursts of pathetic despondency, in which he was almost moved to tears over the hard way in which the world had treated him.

'I wish I was selfish,' he said. 'Other people are happy because they are selfish and only look after themselves. They can't get unhappy, because they don't care about anybody else. It's all because I can't help thinking about this girl, Drem, that makes me wretched. Anybody else would have let her go to the devil, if she wanted; I can't.'

'You're too tender-hearted — that's a fact,' said Arthur, without the least smile, although he looked at Hickes.

'It has come to this at last,' said Hickes, taking out the letter and throwing it to his companion.

Arthur saw in a moment what it meant, and said briefly, 'No, this won't do.'

'Why?'

'Because it won't suit me.'

'What have you to do with it?' said Hickes, bridling up.

'Plenty,' returned Arthur coolly.

'I will go abroad, if I like, and send her that letter, if I like.'

'And I will go up to her house and tell her it is a lie, if I like. It's no use, Hickes. Don't you see what you would do? Do you want to set her free in order to let her marry my cousin?'

'I'd see them both —— first!' said Hickes in great excitement.

'The moment they fancied you were dead, they'd go and marry—depend on it. The marriage would be invalid; but what of that, so long as you kept away, and they fancied they were all right? Now listen to me. Philip is going to marry that Miss Kingscote whom you have heard of. So soon as his marriage is over, you go and murder yourself in this fashion, if you choose.'

'There is some sense in that,' said Hickes.

'Yes, I should think there was. Do you know that Philip only came up from Torquay yesterday?'

With an oath Hickes dashed the glass he held on the table, and smashed it into a hundred fragments.

'*That* is the reason of their escaping from London, then—to connive at his seeing her, without my knowing anything about it.'

'Nothing of the kind,' said Arthur. 'He only went down there three days ago—perhaps to see her, because she is ill. If it is any consolation to you to know that you are absolutely in the way of their happiness, you may have it. But as I tell you, if you go and persuade these people that you are dead before Philip has married Miss Kingscote, he never will marry her: he will marry somebody else. But once this marriage with her comes off, then you can go and do what you like. By the way, how do you propose to live abroad?'

'I don't know—I don't care. What I'm sick of is, living here in this wretched way.

I want to put things as they were before I ever went near the girl—only she shall not marry Philip Drem. I will relieve her from my presence; only she must not marry him.'

'You strike the balance of justice with an admirable fairness,' said Arthur. 'Only, to leave matters as you found them, you should put Miss Seaford—I beg your pardon, your wife—in the way of marrying my cousin. They would have married but for you.'

'You are asking too much,' said Hickes with a jealous frown.

'*I* don't ask it!'

'You only want to make me uncomfortable,' said Hickes peevishly. 'But you needn't remind me that I owe the whole of my present condition to you. Sometimes, when I think of it, I feel that I should like to choke you. I may do that yet, so you needn't laugh.'

'I hope you won't,' said Arthur. 'You take very absurd views of things. I look on myself as your benefactor. If you have

bungled your relations with your wife, it is your affair, not mine. I told you how to secure for yourself a pretty wife and a tolerable sum of money. You got both; and you come and blame me because you have not made a good use of either. It is very unfair, very unreasonable. With any other man I should get angry; but I feel that you've done me a good turn at the same time.'

'You're precious clever,' said Hickes gloomily; 'but don't come near me when I'm mad with drink, or there'll be an awkward settling of accounts. After all,' he added with some vehemence, 'I am not sorry for what is done. If I had not meddled in the affair, she would have married Philip Drem. And I would sooner cut myself to pieces than see her married to that man.'

As he spoke the irresolute mobile features become clouded with a concentrated jealous hate, which produced the most singular expression; and Arthur, regarding his companion, began to think that Hickes

might be a more dangerous enemy, when moved by evil passions, than he had fancied. He had not credited him with the capacity for this intensity of feeling, which for the moment made the weak face almost fierce.

CHAPTER IX.

ABOUT A PORTRAIT.

Mr. Philip returned to London and to his duties as Violet's affianced bridegroom. She noticed that he was rather more constrained in his manner towards her after his visit to Torquay; that was all. He still paid her every attention; they went about together continually; and although Philip was a trifle more grave and listless than was his wont, nothing interfered with the frank friendship which existed between them.

All their most intimate friends who knew of the engagement congratulated them, of course; and nothing could exceed the exuberant pleasure which Mr. Drem manifested. He took to petting Violet even as Mrs. Drem had done; but he evinced his interest in a much more practical way. He made her presents which

astonished everybody, and which Violet was almost frightened to accept.

'They don't go out of the family,' said Mr. Drem merrily to his wife.

It seemed, at last, that the measure of Mrs. Drem's happiness was full. She was so pleased with the successful result of all her schemes, that her daily life was now a perpetual smile. She had nothing to do but reap the delicious results of all her manifold labours; and she saw herself recognised as the good genius of both families.

Of course the little matter with Sir James was soon arranged. He no sooner learned that Violet of her own accord had accepted Philip, than he went to her and said:

'Is this true that Mrs. Drem tells me?'

'Yes, papa,' said she, looking down.

'Now, tell me, Violet — is it of your own free will that you accepted him? You remember what I said to you about our money-affairs—you haven't allowed that to influence you? You know, Violet, I would

rather be a beggar to-morrow than see you making yourself unhappy in order to please me. Are you sure you accepted him of your own free choice?'

'Why, of course, papa,' she said, looking up, but still somewhat red in the face. 'I would not marry a man whom I did not like.'

'I hope not—I hope not,' said Sir James hastily.

'If you have any objection to Philip—' she suggested demurely.

'Objection? Pooh, nonsense! You know I haven't. I only wanted to make sure you had not resolved upon this serious step under a false impression that I particularly wished it. I do wish it, of course; but not at the expense of your happiness.'

'My dear papa,' she said, going up to him, 'pray don't make yourself uneasy about me. Do you think, big as you are, that you could compel me to marry a man whom I did not wish to marry?'

'I shouldn't try,' he said gaily; and then, in a moment, he added rather dubi-

ously, 'You know, I fancied, Violet, when this was spoken of some time ago, you were not so well inclined towards Philip.'

'But that is ages ago,' said Violet; 'and I have learned sense since then.'

Sir James went to Mr. Drem, and made up his quarrel with him.

'You understand, then,' he said rather stiffly, 'that my daughter gave her consent of her own choice? that, so far from persuading her to it, I questioned her closely as to whether she had not been under a wrong impression?'

'My dear friend,' said Richard Drem, 'I understand all that. You will forgive my saying that I don't think it any great matter of wonder that a young lady should accept my son without being pressed to it by her father.'

'Certainly not—certainly not,' said Sir James. 'I meant nothing of that kind. Philip is a most exemplary young man; I have said before that I could not wish for a better son-in-law.'

'Quite right,' said Richard Drem; 'you

are quite right, Sir James. He and I have had our little family disputes, but nothing of any consequence. Your daughter will find him an excellent husband.'

'I hope they will be happy,' said Sir James.

'So do I,' said Mr. Drem; adding decisively, 'And whatever money can do for them, that they will have, or my name isn't Richard Drem.'

It was at this time there came to London an Anglo-Indian family, who drew much attention to themselves on account of their appearance, and their regular attendance at all places of public resort. At the Opera or at the theatres, in Hyde-park or in Kensington-gardens of a Sunday afternoon, the *habitués* remarked this peculiar family, consisting of a tall sallow-faced sad-looking Englishman, a short stout olive-brown woman who was apparently his wife, a taller and thinner woman of similar complexion and features, six children, and a black Ayah. It soon became noised abroad that the tall man was a Mr. Borromead,

who had been in commerce in India and China, and who had sold himself to the devil in marrying the daughter of a rich Calcutta Baboo. The appearance of this woman was sufficiently singular. Her squat and swarthy person was adorned in rich stuffs of the most gorgeous colours; and her bare muscular dark-brown arms were adorned with pendulous masses of jewels, which she wore on every occasion. She had a sleepy dull powerful face, with indolent eyes shaded by long eyelashes; and she betrayed no interest in anything around her, except when the Ayah sought to restrain or correct the younger of the children; and then the dull eyes woke up into a sudden fire, and she assumed the aggressive attitude of an animal defending her young. She never spoke to the tall gray-whiskered sallow-faced man who was her husband; he, on the other hand, rarely spoke to her, and seemed to keep separate both from her and the children. These latter she had generally collected around her—sometimes laying a bare brown arm

round one of them, with a look of satisfaction, but no smile, on the stolid face. They were of a much lighter brown than she was, and manifested much curiosity in the theatrical performances. She, on the contrary, scarcely paid heed to the stage, but regarded her children with a steady animal-like stare. The taller and thinner woman was her sister. She had a more intelligent look; but she had the same olive-brown skin, the same sleepy eyes, the same dry and jet-black hair; and she wore the same brilliant colours and massive jewelry.

Violet, Mrs. Drem, and Philip were at one of the theatres one evening, and had been noticing this strange party in an opposite box, when Mr. St. John—Philip's elderly bachelor friend in the days when he was secretary to the Analytical Society—came up from the stalls, and said that Mr. Borromead would be glad to be introduced to Richard Drem's son.

'I think he knew your father in China,' said Mr. St. John.

Philip went round to the box with his

friend, and the introduction took place. He was also introduced to the dusky lady in the fiery garments and diamonds; and she was good enough to bestow upon him for a second or two an indolent and sleepy look of inquiry. Then she turned to the stage, or, rather, she laid her arm on the front of the box, and regarded indifferently the heavy band of plain gold at her wrist, and the mass of rings with which her fingers were encrusted.

'The piece is not very entertaining,' said Mr. Borromead, with a look of weariness. 'Shall we take a turn up and down the lobby?'

'If you like,' said Philip.

The tall man seemed to breathe more freely when he got outside the box. They went into the refreshment-room and sat down, and then he said:

'I have often wished to have a few minutes' conversation with you. I have seen you often. I recognised you, before hearing your name, from your likeness to your mother.'

'You knew her?' said Philip with sudden interest.

'I was engaged to be married to her,' he said briefly; and there was more weariness than sadness in his face. Then he added quite suddenly, 'Can I do anything for you?'

'Well—no,' said Philip with a smile.

'Perhaps my offer was too blunt. I should like to become acquainted with you. Mr. St. John says you were recently not on good terms with your father, and rather wanted money. I wish I had been in London then.'

'I am much obliged to you, I am sure,' said Philip. 'But one is not always in the mood to take money that is offered by—'

'You would have accepted my help,' said Mr. Borromead curtly. 'Your mother was my best friend; I was her best friend. Don't imagine I'm going to say anything against your father. She married him with her own free consent. Old Esturiz was ill off: I could not assist them; I was a new

arrival scarcely earning my own living. She would not have married your father but for the sake of her own father; and she had the mortification of finding that her sacrifice was of no avail. Her husband grudged the little assistance she wanted to give her father. Then old Esturiz discovered how matters stood, and refused to accept that little. No woman could be very fond of her husband after that; but she was a good and honourable wife to him to the last. When I think of that time—and I look at it as plainly as I look at this room —I hope I shall never again see any woman whom I know marrying a man whom she does not care for for the sake of his money. Better to be drowned a hundred times over.'

Philip could not help thinking that part of the emphasis of this exclamation was derived from Borromead's own experiences; and, oddly enough, his new companion said directly:

'I have seen more of the world than most people, and have seen it in its most

prosaic aspects; and I believe that the greatest blunder in life that any man or woman can commit is to marry for money alone. It is fatal. Once you do that, it is all over with you.'

Here Mr. St. John nodded significantly to Philip, as much as to say: This is his constant complaint. Get him away from it.

'I suppose you have seen a good deal of English commercial life abroad?' said Philip.

The sallow-faced man said nothing for a second or two, and then he said, apparently to himself:

'Good God, how like that voice is to hers! It is so singular. The eyes are the same, naturally; but how can he imitate her voice so, when she died while he was young? You have exactly the voice of your mother,' he said, looking up and addressing Philip. 'You cannot remember her voice?'

'Not at all. I can remember something of her appearance—a tall, dark-eyed, young creature she must have been, I think

— very quiet and gentle, and perhaps a little sad.'

'You do remember her,' said Borromead. 'That is her portrait exactly. I will show you a picture of her, if you like.'

'I have never seen one,' said Philip. 'The one that belonged to my father was lost somehow in being sent to England.'

'Will you come and dine with me to-morrow evening?' he said eagerly. 'I'd sooner give you a dinner at my club — you'd find it more lively than my home — but I could not show you the picture. Old Esturiz gave it me before he died — a year after your mother died. He was in great wretchedness at the time.'

'Did not my father help him?'

'I tell you, Esturiz was a proud man; and they did not agree. He would not accept anything. I had but little then; but I was getting on; and I did what I could for the unhappy old man, who was in extreme want. A few of the residents had to subscribe to bury him.'

'I should like to hear all about him, and about my mother,' said Philip. 'When shall I see you again?'

'Dine with me to-morrow evening. But no,' he added gloomily, 'the dulness would kill you. Lunch with us to-morrow at two; and then I can show you the portrait, and let you get out of the house. And if you can think between now and then of anything I have it in my power to do for you, you will let me know. Your father is a rich man; but rich men's sons are not always independent. You understand?'

So Philip went back to the box.

'What did the Indian say to you, Philip?' said Violet.

'The Indian is an Englishman,' he said, 'and he knew my mother in China.'

Mrs. Drem's pale sweet face was overshadowed by a frown. Heaven knows the small and gentle woman was not devoured by jealousy, and was probably far from grudging Richard Drem's former wife whatever affection he may have bestowed on her; but the meekest of women will begin

to hate the member of her own sex who is continually being held up to her as an exemplar to point out her own deficiencies. Mrs. Drem borè ill-will to her predecessor merely because she was being continually taunted with the shining beauties and perfections of her husband's former wife. At odd moments she even expressed a sort of sympathy for Philip's mother, and regarded her as the previous victim; but no sooner did Richard Drem begin to talk of his first wife having been a lady, and so on, than the present Mrs. Drem felt inclined to wish that she and her rival could change places.

'You speak as if I were better off than she is,' Mrs. Drem would say bitterly to her husband. 'I wish I could change places with her.'

Even now, when Richard Drem's manner to his wife had much improved, and he scarcely ever referred to the young Spanish girl who had died abroad, Mrs. Drem could not bear to have her name mentioned; and consequently Philip said nothing farther to

her about what Mr. Borromead had told him.

Next day, therefore, Philip went up to Mr. Borromead's house, which was on the north side of Ladbroke-square. The dusky lady of the house was more resplendent in colours, and more sleepy in face, than he had ever seen her before; and she sat at a window and looked over into the square, where her children were playing croquet under the superintendence of the Ayah. Mr. Philip, as in duty bound, began to talk to her, and soon found that the only European language in which she could talk with any fluency was French. Accordingly French prevailed at luncheon; and that may have been one of the causes of Mr. Borromead's taciturnity.

There were a number of portraits among the pictures on the dining-room walls; and directly he went into the room Philip recognised the portrait of his mother, guided thereto chiefly by the likeness to himself. All during luncheon he sat and looked at it in a kind of dream; for it seemed to be

bringing back to him innumerable sights and sounds of a forgotten time. Even Mrs. Borromead perceived the attention he paid to this picture, and demanded the reason.

'It is a striking picture, is it not?' said the host hastily. 'A historical portrait, we believe, although we do not know the original.'

'Yes, it is a very striking portrait,' said Philip absently.

'Mais on dirait vraiment,' said the swarthy woman, 'que ce portrait vous ressemble. Les yeux ont absolument la même expression; on dirait que ce portrait vous reconnait, et voudrait vous parler.'

Philip thought so too. He fancied that the face up there, with the soft dark eyes and the tender expression, recognised him, and wished to speak to him. So powerful was this feeling, that he could scarce prevent himself going nearer and speaking to that calm beautiful face.

'It is a wonderful picture,' he said. 'Do you know who is the artist?'

'Not I,' said Mr. Borromead, glancing

anxiously at his wife, whose languid curiosity was aroused. 'I got it in China, along with a lot of lumber, in payment of a bad debt.'

'Il vous ressemble,' said Mrs. Borromead to Philip; 'tellement que nous devrions vous le donner; vous le feriez passer alors pour le portrait d'une de vos parentes.'

'I will give it to you with pleasure,' said Mr. Borromead, 'if you care to have it. You *might* make it pass for one of your relatives.'

Philip looked at him. He seemed really to mean what he said.

'It is robbing you,' said he, 'of the best portrait you have. Yet I should greatly like to have it.'

'And you shall have it,' said Mr. Borromead. 'I will send it to you to-morrow, if you will give me your address now.'

So it was that a man drove down to Mr. Drem's Park-lane house next day, and left a large covered picture for Mr. Philip.

'What is this you have sent home?' said Mrs. Drem to him when he came in.

'A picture?'

'Yes—I believe so.'

'O, it is one that a friend gave me; I admired it so much.'

'May I see it?'

'Certainly. But it is only a portrait.'

'It is so strange you should have taken a fancy to a portrait,' said Mrs. Drem.

Two of the servants carried the picture up to Mr. Philip's study, and there it was uncovered. He was so intent upon looking at it, that he did not notice the curious way in which Mrs. Drem hastily glanced from the portrait to himself, and back again at the portrait.

'It is a fine head,' she said calmly.

'Yes,' he said, rather relieved to see that she did not guess who the original was.

'Did you ever see a woman with so tender an expression of face as that one?' he asked, still gazing wistfully at the picture.

'Violet has a pretty face,' said Mrs. Drem with a calm smile.

They both left the room together, and he had no notion whatever that his pale placid little stepmother had immediately recognised the portrait as that of the woman who had been so often used to mortify her small share of vanity.

Philip never told his father that he had got this portrait; but one day, when he entered the study, Richard Drem was standing before the picture. He started guiltily when Philip opened the door.

'Where did you get that, Philip?' he said gently, yet with wonder on his face.

'Mr. Borromead gave it to me, sir.'

'Borromead!' thundered Richard Drem, his manner changing instantly. 'How dare that man have a portrait of my wife?'

'I believe he got it, sir, from my grandfather,' said Philip calmly.

'Your grandfather, sir, was a drunken old idiot,' cried Richard Drem with a red face, 'who probably sold the picture for a couple of taels.'

'I don't believe it,' said Philip. 'Mr. Borromead has told me a good deal about

him; and he was with him when he died—in deep distress and misery.'

'So he has been poisoning you against your father?' cried Richard Drem. 'Do you know that he is the man who sold himself to a hideous Indian woman for her money?'

'I believe he did,' said Philip. 'And I believe he regrets it considerably at this moment.'

'You shall not speak to that man. I say I forbid you to go near him or speak to him. I forbid you to utter a single word to him.'

'Pray reflect, sir,' said Philip respectfully, 'whether I am likely to obey your commands or not, before you announce them. I will speak to Mr. Borromead when I choose to do so.'

'Then you had better ask him to support you in idleness!' said Richard Drem hotly. 'If I am to support my son, I will exact obedience from him.'

'So that if I speak to Mr. Borromead, I must again leave your house—this time

being the last, as I told you before. Is that what you mean?'

'No, no, Philip,' cried the father in desperation—'I did not mean that. You must not go away from me again—from your old father, who has no other comfort in the world but you. Why will you provoke me? Why will you speak to a man who is my greatest enemy?'

'This is talk for children—not for men,' said Philip impatiently. 'I am sick of it.'

With that he walked out of the house, leaving Richard Drem to consider whether, in his present fit of passion, he should not cut the picture of his dead wife to pieces, merely because it had belonged to his ancient rival.

Singularly enough Philip had not gone ten yards from the door when he saw Mr. Borromead driving past in a brougham. The carriage was at once stopped.

'I was coming for you. Mr. St. John is very ill, and wants to see you,' stammered Mr. Borromead.

They drove to the station, and went down to Wimbledon directly. The old man with the white hair and the blue eyes had been suddenly struck down, and scarcely expected to live till the morning. All his thoughts ran upon his collection of beetles, which he was anxious should be given to some institution where they would be properly displayed.

'I have asked you in my will to take care of that,' he said to Philip in a weak voice.

'I will do my best,' said Philip. 'Pray don't think any more about them.'

'You may incur some expense in removing them, and you may have to provide new cases for them.'

'That is of no consequence,' said Philip.

'No,' said St. John with a sigh of satisfaction; 'for I have left you what little money I had. Everything I have is yours now—or will be before the morning.'

'But have you no relations?' said Philip with some surprise. 'I have plenty of money, you know.'

'I have not a single relation alive. The money you have you get from your father. You will be none the worse for having some of your own. I wish it was more. I always had a liking for you; and I am sorry I cannot give you what is of more value to you, and let you marry that girl whom you used to speak of.'

The words were becoming less and less distinct, until they ended in a little sharp sigh. Then the stillness of death.

'His soul went past us just now,' said Mr. Borromead with a sort of fear.

Philip remained down at Wimbledon until the time of the funeral. The interval he spent in arranging the dead man's affairs, and getting the beetle-cases into order. After some correspondence, he discovered a public institution anxious to have the collection; and thither it was sent.

All these things being done—the funeral over, the housekeeper and servants paid and dismissed with presents, the house transferred to the landlord, and the furniture bought by him at a valuation—Mr. Philip

returned to town. There remained to him out of St. John's estate a sum of 23,000*l.* What was he to do with it? He wished for no better cigars than those he smoked.

CHAPTER X.

TOWARDS A COLLAPSE.

'You and I have not been quite so frank with each other of late as we used to be,' said Violet to Philip one forenoon.

They were in the Horticultural Gardens, seated on two gray little chairs in the shadow of a cool lime-tree. Violet, in a light morning costume, was indolently engaged with some graceful fancy-work; Mr. Philip was reading, and occasionally talking to her. Beyond them and all around a hot June sun fell on the almost empty gardens —on the still ponds, the gravelled paths, the poplar-avenues, and geranium-beds.

He laid down the book on his knee, and looked at her.

'I don't think we have,' he said. 'Because we have both had to pretend that we

were anxious about this marriage; and neither of us is. I don't think,' he added with a smile, 'that we shall be any the worse off for that.'

'I am beginning to be afraid,' she said.

'Why?' he asked. 'You see plenty of people marrying merely for considerations of money and position—women of refined taste linking themselves to men of bad temper and coarse habits. Yet they seem to live well enough on a system of mutual toleration. In our case there is more than that. You and I are never likely to alter our opinion of each other — we shall be sure, at least, never to be on less amicable terms than we are at present. Now, suppose that we are married now — suppose that you and I have come down after breakfast to amuse ourselves in these gardens. I am quite satisfied, for one. I think you are very pretty, you know—that nobody could be more amiable—that a pleasanter companion could not be found within these islands—what more do I want? And I shall never think other-

wise. I shall always like your frankness, your cheerfulness, your shrewdness, and the bright look of your eyes; and I shall always be thankful to you for marrying me; and we shall get on very well.'

'Your frankness frightens me,' she said seriously. 'When I try to hide from myself the real state of matters, you crush all my self-deception with a few horridly true words. What you say is quite true, Philip,' she added sadly. 'We can hope for nothing more than that.'

'Is it not enough? Why did you and I come here this morning? Was it not because we like to be together, and talk together? — that we enjoy each other's society?'

'Do you think it is enough?' she said, looking him straight in the face. 'Or do you only say so to give me a little comfort? I think you dread what is coming more than I do—only you are too generous to show it. You are not in love with me, Philip; and you never will be.'

'I am not,' he said. 'But whereas, if

I were madly in love with you, you might have some natural fear about what may follow our marriage, you cannot as matters stand. A love of that kind might change, and the falling away of it leave you wretched; my great esteem and liking for you will not change, and we shall always continue on good terms.'

'Philip,' she cried, with a sudden impulse, 'do you believe that? or are you only talking to comfort me? Are you deceiving me? Do you believe what you say? Ought we to marry at all, with this dreadful clear consciousness about us?'

'Shall we be any better if we do not marry?' he said; and then he saw by the expression of her eyes that her thoughts were far away — across a great ocean, in the wild heart of an unknown continent, where a small body of enthusiasts were trying to work out in a new way the problem of life.

'Sometimes I wish we did not know each other so well,' she said; 'that we were not so hideously frank. I wish we

could deceive ourselves just a little bit, to make the future a little bright, if only in the way of possibility. Don't you think we might come to love each other by and by—perhaps years after our marriage? If we could only believe it would come at any time, however late, it would be something to hope for. Philip, what do you think? When you and I are growing old —when these present years will be gone by and forgotten, and we shall have learned to help each other and be kind to each other — will it come then that we shall have the love for each other that we want now, and be really like husband and wife?'

The anxious dark eyes were fixed upon him with so much entreaty, that he was almost ready to swear that he loved her there and then. He avoided the question, however, by saying lightly,

'Do you want us to be like husband and wife—as we see most husbands and wives? Must I be courteous to all women except you, and browbeat you whenever I have the chance? Must I be glad of an

excuse for getting out of your society, to leave you in the house by yourself? Must you become mercenary, narrow-minded, and fretful towards me? I think we will do something better than all that, Violet.'

She sat silent for some little time, and then she said,

'I am very much afraid, Philip. It seems to me we are both persuading each other, giving each other false courage; and that we shall both find, when it is too late, that we have made a desperate blunder.'

'Shall we have as much satisfaction in each other's society as we are having now?'

'Perhaps so,' she said. 'But we shall be miserable because there is nothing more. We shall go on living day after day in a sort of half-listless dissatisfaction, always thinking what our marriage should be, and what it is not.'

'Violet, you are unreasonable,' he said. 'You erect an ideal standard beforehand, and are prepared to call our married life a mistake. People would be far more satisfied with their life, if they systematically

compared it with less fortunate lives rather than with more fortunate lives. After we are married, you must not think of what our life might be under impossible conditions; you must think what it would have been, had we never married at all.'

'You are right, I daresay,' she said; 'but yet I am afraid.'

From the date of this conversation Violet observed a change in Philip's manner towards her. Was it not strange that her eyes, once so full of gay light and cheerfulness, should have become anxious and apprehensive—should have grown morbidly sensitive to such faint alterations in the people around her? Philip was more attentive to her than ever; and, in place of the uncompromising honesty of speech that usually existed between them, he strove to place a certain courtesy and restraint, which prevented her asking the real meaning of his attentions. He wanted to comfort Violet by making her believe that he was really falling in love with her, and at the same time to prevent her destroying the illusion

by putting direct questions to him. So long as they talked to each other with what she had called 'hideous frankness,' such an illusion was impossible. She would have found out the truth in half-a-dozen seconds. He did not love her—would never love her till the end of time; but he liked the girl so much, that he strove to give her the gratification of supposing that he was acquiring a greater tenderness for her than he had hitherto possessed.

The task was not an easy one; and sometimes he sickened of it. Sometimes he felt inclined to go to her and say,

'Violet, you are right. We shall be miserable if we marry. Better continue good friends as we are.'

On the other hand, was it not better to secure the perpetuity of this pleasant friendship by the ceremony of marriage?—and was it not likely to do a great deal of good in other directions? Margery Home must not be brought to the hammer.

The possession of the 23,000*l.* rendered Philip more independent of these considera-

tions; and he was inclined at first to hand over the money to Sir James. He decided, however, that he would leave to his father the opportunity of being generous, reserving for Violet's disposal the sum which he had inherited from old St. John.

The state of affairs generally was not a very stable one. It wanted a good deal of argument to show that the course events were taking was the best for all parties; and even when the argument was proved, there remained a lot of lurking suspicions and doubts which were not calculated to give any one concerned a sense of security. The engine was on the rails, and it actually moved; but there was such a vast deal of complicated and delicate machinery, that one became afraid of its meeting with any slight obstacle, which would infallibly produce a collapse and catastrophe.

'Philip,' said Violet one evening, 'why have you never told me anything about Miss Seaford? You never speak of her at all.'

'You forget she is married,' he said coldly.

'Do they live happily?' she asked gently.

'They do not live together,' said Philip hastily. 'They never have lived together.'

'Why?'

'I do not know,' he said, rather impatiently. 'I believe he was sorry for what he did, and went away—and—and why did you talk about that?'

He rose, and abruptly left the room.

On another occasion she entered a room where he was sitting alone. He was so profoundly absorbed, that he did not hear the sound of her approach.

'What are you thinking so deeply about?' she said, putting her hand on his shoulder.

'Shall I tell you?' he said, quite absently and dreamily.

'Yes—I want to know.'

'I was thinking that there is a man alive whom I may have to murder yet. I think it will come to that.'

CHAPTER XI.

WESTWARD, HO!

THE collapse of this unnatural condition of affairs arrived at last; and it was sudden and decisive. The atmosphere had been becoming daily more sultry and unwholesome, until there came such a flash of white fire, and such a crackling peal of thunder, as made those concerned jump. When the sky cleared, the relations of these people were found curiously altered; and one not unimportant member was found wanting from the circle.

It had soon become apparent to Philip, that the more he tried to make himself and Violet lovers, the less did they become friends. There was now no need for him to lessen intentionally the confidence which had of old prevailed between them; it had gradually been supplanted by a certain re-

straint, which marked each of their meetings. And these had become fewer and less frequent. Mr. Philip discovered that the charming companionship of Violet on all occasions—in the Park, at Opera, ball, and rout, and all the divers places which London offers to young people desirous of meeting each other—was getting less satisfactory than formerly; and chiefly for the reason that the poor girl was evidently in great tribulation as to how this state of matters was to end. She no longer told him so; but he saw that her anxiety had almost become misery, and he was unable to offer her any consolation. As for himself, he was perpetually haunted by a refrain that came to him from out of the half-forgotten past; and the words that were ringing in his ears were Violet's own: '*Whatever you do, Philip, don't marry a woman with whom you are not very deeply in love.*'

This is what it had come to. Mrs. Drem's scheme for the securing of everybody's happiness had been followed out to

the letter, and the end of the play was fast approaching, at which all the people were to find themselves in proper combinations and in happiness. Everything had been so assorted, that there was not a single character who had not been properly compensated and settled in life—except, perhaps, poor Cecil; and he had gone off on his own account, and could not be brought on the stage. Mrs. Drem stood by to ring down the curtain, and allow her various *protégés* to retire into that private happiness with which the public had nothing to do.

One day Philip caught Violet in tears.

'What are you crying about?' he said; for he had scarcely ever seen her cry.

'I don't know,' she said.

'That is a very good thing,' he replied.

'You have not been kind to me of late,' she confessed at last.

'I?'

'You are not to blame. You try to be kind, but you are only making both of us hypocrites; and I, for one, am wretched.'

'So I have been thinking for some time,'

he said gently, 'and have been devising a means to alter this unbearable condition of things. The fact is, Violet, you and I must not marry, whatever comes of it.'

'We must now,' she said, almost with a shudder. 'How are we to escape it? My father will be so vexed; both Mr. and Mrs. Drem will be so angry with me, and angry against you too: how can we escape it now?'

'You would like to escape?'

She looked at him with a timidity which was not frequently seen on the clear, round, bright face.

'Will you think me unkind if—'

'If you say you would rather not marry me?' he asked with a smile. 'Not at all. The fact is, Violet, just as we fancied we were getting everything right, everything was going farther and farther wrong. A week or two more of this, and I should have asked you the same question. As it is, it is better you should ask me to be released from this compact. I had begun to fear it too.'

'We were fast ceasing to be friends,' she said.

'I was beginning to think you rather a nuisance, Violet.'

'I should have hated you, if you had married me.'

'It is singular, is it not, how we find out all these reasons for separation the moment we resolve to separate?'

'But how can you do it?' she asked. 'You will have to do it all; and I am afraid I cannot help you. If I were to say that I won't marry you, because I have changed my mind, they would not believe me. But shall I say that, Philip?—I don't want you to have all their anger.'

'You leave the matter in my hands,' said he, 'and don't trouble your head about it.'

'Are you quite sure you can get us both out of this terrible situation, Philip?' she asked.

'You are so anxious not to marry me! Yes; I can get you out of it in a very definite and irrevocable way.'

'What will you do?' she said, in the tone of a small girl to whom a schoolboy proposes some deed of robbery in a neighbour's garden.

'I will make them stop for ever trying to make you marry me by marrying you to somebody else.'

She scarcely comprehended him.

'Look here, Violet. I have fallen of late into my old useless life — useless to myself and to everybody. Within this last week I have determined to make one final effort to put all these things straight that have been going so confoundedly wrong, with you and with one other person. I made one trial a year or two ago, and missed it; this time I *must* succeed, or else get myself abolished off the face of the earth as a blunder. I shall have one more fling at it; and if I fail, you will not hear much more of me. So far as you are concerned, the thing is simple enough. I will start at once for America, and I will hunt out Cecil, and bring him back to you, and make him marry you.'

First she turned pale, and then she began to sob hysterically.

'Why was it I could not love you, Philip? You deserved it.'

'That would have made matters worse,' said he with a smile. 'Now listen: I shall merely send a brief letter of explanation to my father and to Sir James, telling them both that I will not marry you, and that I have gone abroad. My father will be furious—'

'And Margery Home!' said Violet with a sigh. She saw it going now, and knew that it was partly her doing.

'Your father need not sell Margery Home,' said Philip coolly. 'I will transfer 15,000*l.* out of my 23,000*l.* to his account at the bank. That will let him get over his present difficulties.'

'O, Philip,' she cried, 'you burden me with your goodness! How can I show you how grateful I am!'

'You may have an opportunity some day,' he said seriously, almost sadly. 'After I come back—after I have brought Cecil to

you—I have something else to do. I may get into trouble, Violet—into disgrace that would frighten you if I spoke of it now. And you are the only one in England whom I shall ask to remain my friend then. And you will?'

'You know I will, whatever it is,' she said, bravely giving him her hand, and looking him in the face, although her eyes were full of tears.

'Whatever comes of it, Violet, you believe the best of me.'

'I will never believe anything but what I know of you now.'

These were almost the last words he spoke to her in England. A few days afterwards he had all his preparations ready for leaving; and just before he drove to the station whence he was to go down by a night-train to Liverpool, he wrote the following letter to Violet's father:

'My dear Sir James,—I have judged it better for Violet's sake, as well as my own, that the proposed marriage should

not take place. If you ask her, she will tell you that it is out of no disrespect to her that I have come to this resolution. I know you would not willingly do anything to interfere with your daughter's future happiness; and this marriage, we have both of us decided, would not have been a happy one. She is aware of my resolve. She is also aware that—being about to start for America—I have taken the liberty of transferring to your bank-account a sum of 15,000*l.*, which I now beg you to make use of. You can repay me at any time—I have no particular use for the money; and I ask you to take it merely that Violet should not have to part with Margery Home — a catastrophe which she, rightly or wrongly, fears might happen. I must leave her to make my peace with you, and to persuade you to use the money which I have placed in the ——— bank under your name.'

'There,' said Philip, as he put the letter in his pocket, 'I hope he will not go off

into a passion, and make a vow never to touch the money. But Sir James has a good deal of common sense, like his daughter.'

He also wrote a brief note to his father, saying that, in order to avoid the unpleasant scenes which might arise from his having broken off the marriage with Violet Kingscote, he had gone off for a trip to America.

'About *his* going into a passion there is not much doubt,' he said, putting the one letter beside the other.

Mrs. Drem was surprised that he shook her hand and bade her good-bye when he left that evening to go down to his club. But she thought it was perhaps some bit of serio-comic extravagance, and said nothing.

His outfit and small stock of luggage had been previously sent down to Liverpool; and now, as he walked into the station, he had nothing but an umbrella in his hand. He was a quarter of an hour early; and so he got his ticket and was lounging about, when he saw a hansom

drive up, from which there descended a young lady, alone, and deeply veiled.

'Violet!' he said in amazement; 'why did you think of such an imprudent thing?'

'I could not help coming to see you off—to thank you, Philip—O, I don't know what to say to thank you!'

'Nonsense!' said he; 'get into a cab, and drive home before anybody discovers your absence. You must not go driving about London alone like this. And in a hansom too!'

'I thought I should be late,' she said.

'I suppose I must see you home,' he said, 'and take my chance of an early morning train.'

'Don't be unkind, Philip,' she said. 'Let me go on to the platform with you.'

So they went on to the platform together, and Violet stood by his side, trembling a little with excitement amid all the bustle of passengers and porters.

'Westward, ho!' said Philip, 'to bring back the lover to his own true love! It is a quest worthy of ancient times, is it not?'

He saw that she blushed, because—with the most natural motion in the world—she had lifted her veil, and had raised the pretty round face a little bit. 'Take your seats, please!' She gave him two kisses instead of one this time, and said, 'God bless you, Philip!' with a sort of sob; and then the train slowly left the platform, and she caught a last glimpse of his face through a mist of tears.

CHAPTER XII.

THE WASHOOTA CONVENTION.

To go to America to find out a particular man without knowing his address, is rather a bold enterprise; but Philip, once in New York, found, to his surprise and delight, very little difficulty in discovering the whereabouts of Lord Cecil. Public attention had been drawn to the new band of social regenerators, who, undeterred by the numerous failures of the Owen Communities and the Fourier Phalanxes, were making still one more experiment. The constitution of the Washoota Convention, its habitat, and its principal members, were well known in New York; and special prominence in all the articles descriptive of the new association was given to Lord Cecil Sidmouth, who was taken to represent the

up-springing of a new feeling among the English aristocracy, and as a pioneer for others of his class.

Mr. Philip immediately left New York, and went down into Pennsylvania. It took him a day to get down to the station nearest the Washoota Convention; and next morning he got a horse and proceeded to ride over to the farm. It was a hot and bright July day; and as he trotted along the heavy and sandy road in the glare of the sunlight, the clusters of chestnuts that appeared everywhere along the water-course offered a tempting shade; while here and there he saw a grove of walnut-trees, the shadows of which, underneath their dark green, were even deeper. The rough and sandy road followed the windings of the river along a picturesque and fertile valley sparsely inhabited; and when at last he came in sight of Washoota, he regarded it at first sight as merely one of the ordinary farms of somewhat unusual size.

As he drew nearer, however, he perceived his mistake. First he came to

tolerably-sized saw-mill down by the river-side; and he could hear the whirring of the bands and wheels within. Two or three rudely-constructed carts, or rather drays, stood outside, with a couple of good horses yoked in one of them. There was no human being about, however—probably the men were inside.

A minute or two thereafter, however, he came in sight of the new community. Down in some meadows near the river he saw a number of people busy in tossing hay about. Above these meadows, on a level plateau, were a number of plain-looking buildings, which, for the most part being built of new wood, and having vines trained up the front, had a bright and pleasing look in the sunshine. The central building was a two-storied erection, about two hundred feet in length. There was little ornament about it, except a projecting porch over the door, and a wooden balcony along one end. The square in front of this large house was prettily planted with plots of flowers. Behind it was a deep grove of walnut-trees,

with a number of wooden seats dimly visible; and adjoining that a spacious kitchen-garden, in which one or two ladies were engaged in gathering vegetables—presumably for the midday meal.

'Cecil's red hair, for a thousand pounds!' cried Philip to himself, as he watched a short square-built young man, in rough trousers and shirt-sleeves, busily handling a rake. He rode his horse down to the river-side, and hallooed across. Cecil looked up, but did not recognise him.

'Where is your bridge?' cried Philip.

'Come across where you are, if you want anything. It isn't deep.'

He forced his horse into the current, and gained the opposite bank; then, so soon as he was clear of the tall weeds, he jumped to the ground, and went forward, leading his horse by the reins.

'Cecil, old man, don't you know me?'

'Philip Drem!' said the other, looking as if a ghost had appeared. 'What brought you here?' Then he added quickly, 'Is she ill?'

'Violet? No. Never was better.'

'What is the matter, then? Why have you left her?'

'Leave her? I am not bound to her.'

'You are not married, then?'

'No, nor likely to be. Put down your rake, and come and get me something to drink; then I will tell you all the story. I am frightfully thirsty.'

'I can't give you anything better than milk,' said Lord Cecil, with a laugh. 'We have neither wine nor spirits, although, as you see, we have plenty of vines.'

'Anything that is fluid will do. So this is your model farm. It is wonderfully pretty; and you seem to live an enjoyable life. What is that in the field beyond the houses?'

'Tomatoes. Did you never see a field of tomatoes? We get eight dollars a bushel for them by sending them to New York.'

'But your Convention has not had time to cultivate all this place?'

'Bless you, no! We bought the six hundred acres and the saw-mill pretty much

as you see them; only we have had to build the small school-house there, and that big building; and we are about to try the making of bricks, when we may still farther improve our premises. And how are you, Phil? And how are they all in the old country? By Jove, it's a pleasure to hear your voice again!'

By this time they had left the meadows, and were strolling up by the side of a melon-field (very picturesque this was to look at just then) towards the central house. Lord Cecil took his friend into the dairy, and there obtained a tumblerful of new milk from a smart young dairy-maid, who blushed a good deal. Mr. Philip wondered whether the blush meant, that this was a young lady who was amused at being caught in a masquerade-dress. Lord Cecil paid with perfect gravity the sum of one cent for the milk; and then they went outside. Philip's horse had now been brought up by a lad; and Cecil himself took it into the stables and attended to its comfort.

'Now tell me what has brought you

here, said he, when they had got into the open air again.

'I came on a mission of search for you,' said Philip. 'I have been sent to bring you back to England.'

'Who sent you?' said Lord Cecil with much astonishment.

'I am not going to compromise anybody; but you ought to guess. Your coming away here was all owing to a blunder. You thought I was going to get married. I had no such intention. It is true that your leaving England, and some other matters which I need not explain now, made Violet and I enter into a foolish and impossible compact. We found it could not be kept. The fact is, we were nearly being goaded into marrying each other; and it was only when the thing became imminent that we saw it would not do. Accordingly I am here. I will not say who sent me; perhaps nobody sent me. But I mean to carry you back to England with me.'

'And leave the Washoota?' said Lord Cecil.

'You are a profound impostor, Cecil. As I told you my story I saw your face gradually lay aside its normal scowl, until you very nearly reached the catastrophe of a smile. Then presently you say, with the voice of a sick infant, "Leave the Washoota?" Why, yes, of course; leave the Washoota —before it leaves you. It is sure to be a failure. Where is the Havershaw Community? Where is the Kendal Community? Where is New Harmony? Where is Yellow-Spring Community? Where are all the Phalanxes and Brook Farm and Hopedale?'

'You are quite wrong; you are all wrong,' said Lord Cecil anxiously. 'The Washoota is different from all these. We are bound to succeed. We have no communion of property; it is an impossible theory. We have no coercive laws about religion; every man may please himself in that, as in everything else, so long as he does not interfere with his neighbour's freedom. We do not invite all the idle and incompetent and swindling populations

of the large towns to join us, and share the profits of our labours. We are a joint-stock company, each man being paid for his particular kind of work on a scale of relative values; and the profits will be divided equally among the members at the end of the year.'

'How do your shares stand?' asked Philip, with the scant courtesy of a sceptic.

'At par,' replied Lord Cecil boldly. 'But we don't aim at making money. We aim at living a wholesome, honest, agreeable, and invigorating life; and all conditions, moral or otherwise, which produce that result we elevate into fixed laws. Moses was the first promulgator of our system. We want to do for modern society what Moses did for the Israelites. Only we shall not frighten our people from eating pig by brandishing thaumaturgic wonders in their eyes. We shall appeal to their reason in raising this or that natural provision into a law.'

'And if there are dissentients?'

'We will expel them.'

'And if they refuse to go?'

'They must starve.'

'And if they steal?'

'We will duck them in the river.'

'The fact is, you mean to save the heavy expenses of government—which we at home pay in the shape of taxes—by governing yourselves. But amateur government, and amateur farming at the same time, want a deal of attention. How if a lot of you fall sick?'

'We have already instituted a fund for the support of the sick or aged; and the fund is stopped out of the profits. I tell you, we don't want to make money; and our scale of relative values is merely nominal. Breakfast costs three cents; dinner five; supper four. Our wages vary from seven to twelve cents per hour—the latter is the maximum. We guarantee a market for everything that a man does—provided he tells us first what he is going to do—and we give him value-cheques for his work; which cheques are good against food, and also against the yearly division

America. If you were to offer its shelter and assistance to people in general, you would soon have to construct the same cumbrous system of repressive law and punishment which society has had to get up for its protection elsewhere.'

'But don't you see,' retorted Cecil, who looked rather disgusted at having his scheme of general social reformation so ignominiously narrowed in its possibilities, 'that even if we can't do the world any good, we can at least retire from the corruptions and affectations of society, and live a sweeter and wholesomer life by ourselves?'

'Yes, certainly. But if we have got down to this lower platform, Cecil, what do you say to my mission? You are only pleasing yourself here—you are not working for the good of society. And so I tell you, that I have been sent to summon you to England; and I can see something in store for you there better than haymaking and the division of annual profits.'

'"Get thee behind me, Satan!"' said Lord Cecil.

At this moment there rang a bell which was heard all over the farm; and presently there were seen to gather from all sorts of corners and nooks the inhabitants of the small colony, who had laid aside their implements.

'They are coming in to dinner,' said Lord Cecil. 'You must dine with us. That is the dressing-bell—or rather the washing-bell—and in ten minutes another bell will bring them into the dining-hall.'

Philip and his companion entered the hall as the people assembled — men and women, mostly in the prime of life, plainly dressed, very happy-looking and healthy. There were a few young people also, of both sexes; and some children, who were accommodated at a side-table. The general table extended down nearly the whole length of the large room; and the windows fronting the balcony being open, a light wind came in and stirred coolly around the place. The dinner was excellent—plenty of plain and wholesome food, in considerable variety, and thoroughly clean and well

cooked. There was nothing drunk but water.

'What do you do with your grapes?' said Philip.

'Sell them,' said Cecil.

'Suppose one were to be sick, and wanted wine?'

'The doctor has wine in his store,' was the answer.

'I wish I was ill,' said Philip.

'I am not going to break the laws for your sake,' said Lord Cecil sturdily; 'so you must content yourself with water.'

After dinner there was half-an-hour's rest, most of the members going into the walnut-grove, and sitting down to chat, or read, and smoke. Smoking was nearly universal among the men, so that it was clear the Washoota Convention had been considerate to one of the vices. Lord Cecil introduced Philip to several of his friends; and also to a tall, lean, and brown person, who called himself Joshua J. Smith. Mr. Smith condescended — nay, eagerly consented—to take one of Mr. Philip's cigars;

and while rolling the same about in his teeth, delivered an extempore harangue on the prospects of the Convention, which he regarded chiefly in their pecuniary aspect. Mr. Philip feebly endeavoured to follow his calculations as to the growing of okra and the production of hominy, and finally gave a lazy assent to everything he said. When he had gone away, Lord Cecil said,

'We are all afraid of that man. He has got too much power. He owns three-fourths of the stock, and we are beginning to see that he has come into the scheme merely to make money. Any day he might compel us to sell out in order to pay him, and he has used this power to enforce his own notions about various things. He alone was able to abolish the conscience-clause we had in the little school here, merely by threatening to burst up the whole concern.'

'Ah, then, you are not quite in so flourishing a condition as you had led me to believe,' said Philip.

'We are flourishing enough,' said Lord Cecil warmly. 'Nothing could be more prosperous; only we want time. In ordinary hands, we should have no fear whatever; but this mercenary brute is a dangerous fellow; and several are deeply disgusted, and a few have already left. They say he wants to get the whole place into his hands, and that he would like to get us into trouble, in order to force us to sell the estate, the mill, and the houses to him. Lots of us on coming here expended whatever ready money we had in building and improving, without keeping any particular account; but this fellow came with a different purpose: we wanted more money; he lent it to us on the security of stock; the stock became his; in short, he is the principal owner of the place.'

'And you are his day-labourers.'

'That is an ugly way of putting it.'

'It may prove to be the true one when he clears you out.'

'To tell you the truth, this man's insolence and intermeddling have nearly made

me resolve, on one or two occasions, to quit the place for good.'

'Quit it now for good,' said Philip. 'I thought you would jump at the invitation I offered you.'

'If I leave here, it will be a confession of failure.'

'Never mind what it is. Suppose the scheme were ever so successful, it would work in no way towards the benefit of mankind. It would set the example of withdrawing from our mixed and imperfect society those very elements which it can least spare. On the other hand, don't you understand my message? Anybody less given to theorising than you would not require a moment to decide.'

'I suppose I must go with you,' said the red-headed young man with a sigh, as he looked down on the sunny meadows and the stream. He had really become attached to the spot, and to his dreams of what the Convention was to accomplish. He still believed in it. With a fresh incoming of money, might not Joshua J. Smith—the

Old Man of the Sea—be removed from his place?

'You are not very grateful to—to the person whose messenger I am,' said Philip.

'I am grateful,' he said. 'When I get to New York—when I find myself actually on the way to England—I shall be filled with joy. I shall not be able to say how much I thank you and her for a happiness I had given up for ever. But just at present, don't you see, Philip—'

And again his eyes wandered over the pleasant valley, until, at the corner of the melon-field, they lighted upon the lanky figure of Mr. Joshua J. Smith.

'If you wait here two days, I will go with you,' he said decisively.

'Can you put me up here?'

'Of course. You may have a bed and such food as you saw; and you can take a turn at something, if you like, to amuse you. Smith wants us to pay for strangers' accommodation not in the nominal currency of the Convention, but according to the prices which the accommodation would

fetch in New York. That is only a bit of his sharp practice; and I suppose he will force it on them by and by.'

'Suppose we drown Joshua J. Smith before we go: you have got no punishment for murder here, have you, beyond expulsion?'

'I wish we could put him through a sausage-machine, or get rid of him somehow.'

After all, Lord Cecil was not the foundation-stone of the Convention; and the Washoota people made less fuss about his going than Philip had expected. Two days thereafter, Philip and he were riding along the sandy road to the nearest village, whither Lord Cecil's small stock of luggage had been already sent.

'It was very generous of you, Phil, to come all this way to oblige two unhappy young people.'

'I owed Violet a good turn,' he said. 'But don't suppose she was pining for you. On the contrary, she disguised her affliction admirably; and you must not go back with

the notion that you are conferring a favour on her. She is rather an exacting young woman, you know.'

'Violet and I will understand each other perfectly,' said Lord Cecil, who had resumed his eye-glass on quitting his bucolic life. 'What I am mostly concerned about is, the extent to which my small income will go in providing her with a suitable house.'

'Take a small house in the country, or by the sea,' said Philip; 'have it prettily and neatly furnished, and keep a good cook, and Violet will be happy. You forget, however, that I was not commissioned to come out here with an offer of her hand to you. Perhaps she won't have you at all. Marriage, in fact, was never mentioned between us—at least *your* marriage was not.'

'If Violet has brought me back to Europe for nothing—' said Lord Cecil, speaking as if he were already there.

'You will dog her steps until she repents? Very well; but don't say that I said she would marry you.'

Philip never having been in America

before, the two friends stopped a day or two in New York; went up to Boston; had a look at one or two of the lakes; and finally sailed from Quebec. Philip, indeed, spent nearly three weeks in America; but he did not write a book about it.

The day after his return, Mr. Philip met Miss Violet, by appointment, in Regent-street.

'I am going to take you to see a friend,' he said. And she blushed and said nothing, although she had spent the morning in inventing pretty speeches of gratitude for him.

The trysting-place was the National Gallery, which on the student-days may be regarded as the most notorious flirting-spot of London. A good number of the gentler students are accomplished men-slayers themselves; and the policemen in charge of the rooms preserve an excellent gravity when they come upon couples in corners who have been staring at one picture for an hour. Towards four o'clock many gentlemen call, and inquire for their

sisters; and the door-keeper is obliging. From that hour most of the easels are deserted; and fairies in light attire, with green bands through their flaxen hair, consort with grave persons who pretend to have a sympathy with high art; and these walk about in isolated pairs, and become æsthetic in their conversation. Sometimes the flirt is not content with one visitor; and the story goes, that there was lately a promising young performer who used to carry about with her three photographs, all fitting one brooch, into which receptacle she placed the picture of him whose afternoon it happened to be. Philip asked for a certain Miss St. Quentin; and he and his companion were permitted to walk up into the rooms. Violet strove to retain her composure, and only partially succeeded. Philip saw that the hand which held a flower he had given her trembled much. In the second room they saw Miss St. Quentin at her easel; a young gentleman was talking to her. All at once this gentleman started from his chair, and came hurriedly forward.

'O, Cecil,' said Violet with a pretty look of wonder, 'are you here?'

Miss St. Quentin, a tall young lady, with large eyes and artistically-disarranged fair hair, asked Mr. Philip if he had seen the head of Andrea del Sarto; and he went with her to see it. She began to tell him that she had been painting her own face from a looking-glass, and that she had found out she could see her soul. After gazing for four or five minutes, her soul came into her eyes; and then she tried to catch the expression of it. She went on to touch upon pre-Raphaelitism, and the propriety of girls dressing always in white, and always wearing white lilies in their hands as they sat in their homes. She talked rapidly, vaguely, and prettily for a length of time, until she suddenly found that her companion was not listening, and seemed to be unconscious of her presence.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE AVENGER AT LAST.

One evening Hickes sat down and wrote the following letter, which he addressed to 'Miss Seaford.' He was in the reading-room of an obscure club which he had joined, and which held its midnight meetings in the neighbourhood of Charing-cross. It was towards ten o'clock at night, and the place was empty.

'Dear Lilian,' he wrote, 'I have seen you very often of late, although you have not seen me once. I have watched for you, sometimes for a whole day together; and I have been satisfied if I could only catch a glimpse of your face. And then, again, when you went away, I have felt more miserable than ever; for you looked so ill and care-worn and sad, and I know that I have helped to make you so. Perhaps

you will misapprehend me to the last—I cannot help it—but I implore you to give me one last chance to clear myself, and tell you—what I cannot tell you now. I have made you afraid of me, I know; and I am not sure you will grant my request. Even then it will not much matter, for I cannot live like this. Do not be afraid; I will never seek to compel you to speak to me; but if you do not, one resource is left to me. I will ask to see you to-morrow morning about ten o'clock. If the love I have for you, and the wretchedness I feel, could only plead for me, you would not refuse me an interview of a few minutes.'

He went out and posted this letter; then returned to the club. He could not drink anything, and he was quite pale.

Men came in from the theatres, had some supper, talked in the smoking-room, and went home. Hickes sat still, and spoke to none; but as the time went on, he grew more and more restless. He kept turning over newspapers and magazines; but he read not a line.

'Why has everybody gone so soon?' he said impatiently to the waiter.

'It is half-past one, sir,' said the man.

'But they are often here until three.'

'Sometimes, sir,' said the other with a sigh of resignation.

The waiter went downstairs and fell fast asleep.

Hickes continued to walk about the room in a restless way. He had been drinking wildly until the day before; then he had suddenly stopped; and now he felt a strange lightness in the head that seemed ready to form itself into odd aerial shapes. There was a newspaper in particular which had fallen beneath a chair; and this newspaper, without the least noise, seemed to have the power of rising and lifting the chair with it, and would then as gently subside into its former position. He had a general and feverish apprehension that phantasms and hideous things might appear if he suddenly turned his head in any one direction; but this motion of the newspaper was the only abnormal thing that he actually saw.

By and by, however, the newspaper under the chair grew smaller and whiter, and at last had the appearance of the head of a corpse. The corpse was that of a woman; and the face was fixed and blanched, with the eyeballs staring blankly upwards. He could not move, but only look. He had never seen this woman—the dead face was that of a stranger. All at once, however, the eyes began to move, and to look at him, and the face began to laugh.

He sprang upon the table nearest him with a shriek that rang through the empty house. The waiter came running upstairs and into the room; and then Hickes, with the perspiration standing on his pale face, jumped down from the table, and in a hurried and excited way apologised for the noise he had made.

'When will the daylight be here?'

'Presently,' said the man, looking to the window, where there was a blue tinge appearing through the blinds.

'I will go now, then,' said Hickes.

He walked down the empty streets to

Charing-cross; and here a strange sight presented itself. All round the gray-stone square the tall buildings were dark and ghostly, and the lamps burned brightly in the violet-hued twilight of their shadows. But overhead the transparent blue had lightened, and behind St. Martin's church there came up from the east a pale clear glow that was faintly tinted with yellow. The new light in the eastern sky glimmered down on the square; but all around the silent buildings were a deep lilac in colour, with the shining points of the gas-lamps growing redder as the dawn above cleared and became silver-gray. Far down in the south the clock-tower of the Parliament Houses caught a tinge of the morning on its eastern front; and Big Ben boomed out the hour of three with a slow distinctness that increased the profound stillness that reigned around. Then a cab came rattling along from Pall Mall under the dusky blue shadow of the National Gallery; some workmen appeared down in Parliament-street carrying bags of tools in their hands; the

white fire above St. Martin's church crept farther over the violet transparency of the sky; the stars in the west sank farther and farther out of sight; and the coming day seemed to bring a breezy freshness with it up out of the east. Hickes shivered slightly, and then turned listlessly to walk up the empty Haymarket, and so northward.

It was still early morning when he arrived at Hampstead. He saw the postman go up to James Lawson's door, and he knew that his message was now being taken in to Lilian. He had got two hours to idle away — how should he pass the time?

He went up to the Heath and lay down, turning his face from the glare of the sun. But sleep was impossible. He felt languid and physically wretched; but he could not sleep. A restless impatience had taken possession of him; and he tossed about on the bare grass, and moaned to himself, and tried in vain to collect his thoughts. Sick and exhausted as he was, there was a fire as if of fever in his veins; and all he hoped for

was, that he would have enough strength left to carry him over the crisis that was approaching.

As he staggered up to James Lawson's door, few would have recognised in this broken-down trembling wretch the methodical and contented young man who used to live an easy and uneventful life in Sloane-street. He shook in every limb; his eyes were bleared, and yet restless and wild; his face was pallid and sunken; his gait the gait of a man who has just come out of a fever. He was so weak that, after knocking at the door, he had to steady himself by placing his hand on the wall until the maid-servant came.

'Ask Miss Seaford if I may speak to her for a few minutes.'

'Will you come in, sir?'

'No. Go and ask her first—and be quick.'

'She said, if you called, you were to come in.'

'She said that?'—and the pallid face lit up somewhat.

'Yes, sir; Miss Seaford is waiting for you now.'

He entered the house with the air of a delirious man. He was shown into a room; and there before him stood Lilian, quite calm and pale. He started and shook violently when thus confronted with her; then he regarded her for a moment with a strange expression of face; and finally he sank helplessly into a chair, crying,

'O, my darling—I have killed you—I have killed you!'

'Are you ill?' she said. 'Can I get something for you?'

He was still trembling violently, and looked, indeed, like a dying man.

'Yes; get me some brandy. No!' he suddenly added with impetuous vehemence; 'I will not take brandy or anything. I have tasted not a drop of brandy for two days—I will not touch it again.'

'I am glad to hear it,' said Lilian.

'How cruel you are!' he said. 'You speak as if I were a complete stranger to you—as if I were a dog. How cruel and

hard-hearted you are, in spite of your pretty face and your soft eyes! You have the face of an angel—something I have never seen in the face of a woman—something that I dream about—and yet you have not the kindness of a woman.'

'I am very sorry for you,' she said, looking down. 'You are ill; what can I do?'

He started to his feet.

'Do you know that, in spite of your cruelty, I love you better than ever a man loved a woman? It is a passion within me—a burning thing that is killing me. I do not care whether you are cruel; if you were a devil, I should be quite as hopelessly lost. And sometimes I think you are a devil in the guise of a woman; and I make up my mind to tear the mask off, and expose you, and punish you.'

She retreated a step or two, frightened by his excited manner.

'Do not be afraid,' he said. 'I made a mistake just now. I determined not to frighten you — not to threaten — but to beseech you. I forgot myself — that was

all; sometimes I lose control of myself like that, when I think over all I suffer. If you only knew what I suffer — the hours of agony night after night, the horrible waking, the weary watching up here to see you, and then to look at the door being shut, and find myself out there alone! Lilian, if you knew how wretched I am, you would pity me. You cannot be so hard-hearted as you seem. I can see in your eyes now that you are not proud and implacable—that you are a little sorry for me. And if you have given me a little pity, why not a little love?—only a little—I beg it from you!'

He stretched out his hands to her; and she was so moved by his entreaty, that it was almost in despair she cried,

'I cannot — I cannot! Anything but that; for that I cannot give you. I am sorry—I am distressed, when I hear what you say. There is almost nothing I wouldn't do to make you less wretched than you are. I am deeply sorry; but I cannot do what you ask.'

'You will not try,' he said bitterly.

'You are so calm and satisfied, that you do not need the affection of others. You will not try to be affectionate—to think kindly of me, who would be so grateful to you.'

'I have tried,' she said with a sigh. 'If I had thought that it was possible for us to live together on the only terms on which a husband and wife should live together, I would not have been so obdurate as you think I have been. I thought it was possible at one time; I thought I might become affectionate towards you, and that I might forget what led to the marriage. But when it came to the last moment, I knew it was impossible. I should have preferred death. You say I am hard-hearted. Perhaps I am. But I cannot help it—I cannot help it; and I am very sorry. I have tried to like you much, deeming that was my duty. It has all been to no purpose.'

'The Lawsons have set you against me,' he said.

'Certainly not,' she replied. 'And I have tried to think only of your better qualities, and to bring myself to like you.

I think you might have been very happy with some other woman. Perhaps I have done you more harm than you have done me. If so, I am deeply grieved for it.'

'How good you are!' he said suddenly; 'how tender, and kind, and thoughtful! You have no selfishness; you say nothing of yourself—of what I have done to you. You are all this; and it makes me the more desperate that I cannot reach your love. O, Lilian, is it quite impossible?'

She was silent.

'Is there no hope for me at all—none?'

'I need not tell you what is untrue,' she said — and there was a tender pity shining in the dark-blue eyes as she looked at him — 'I shall never love you as a wife ought to love her husband.'

He seemed scarcely to comprehend her words for a little while; and then he murmured to himself, with his eyes turned vacantly towards the carpet,

'None—no hope—none at all! This is the end — I have come to it at last. I thought it was coming. Long ago I seemed

to know that I would sit here this morning —is it not strange?—and ask you this very question. I can remember it all as if you and I had lived hundreds of years ago, and had met as we met this morning, and spoken as we have spoken. I remember to have heard you say these things. That is why I am not surprised. This morning I had forgotten. I thought there was a chance. I lay upon the Heath there, and I made myself believe you might have some pity on me. There is no chance now, you say; it is all over and gone.'

He moved a few steps nearer the door.

'I have not spoken harshly to you?' he said. 'There is nothing of this morning you will remember afterwards and wish it had been otherwise?'

'You must not go away like that!' she cried. 'You tremble — you are ill. Sit down, and I will get you some water.'

'The water you would bring is not strong enough,' he said with a bitter smile. 'The water I want to drink is some that will kill in a second.'

She shuddered, in spite of herself, as she regarded him; and this he perceived at once, and a shadow of vexation passed over his face.

'What a fool I am!' he said. 'I swore I wouldn't frighten you any more. I did not mean what I said. We are parting very good friends, are we not?'

He offered her his hand as he said good-bye; and she strove to conceal the reluctance with which she had to approach him. But when she touched his hand, she started. It was burning.

'I am sure you are ill,' she said. 'Shall I ask Mr. Lawson to come and see you?'

'No,' he said, looking at her with a strange wistfulness. 'If I am ill, there is a cure for me. There is none for you. Will you ever be what you once were—what I can remember you — when you looked so young and happy, and I could hear you singing in the house when I passed it? It is not a long time since then; but there has been a great change in you — a great change. Can anything

alter you back now, and make you what you were? Can we bring back these two years, and take away from your face all they have put there? If I could do that, it would be something; and then you would say, with your kindness, that if I was bad, I was not altogether bad—that I did my best to undo what I had done—that I had tried to make you happy at last. Good-bye; I shall not trouble you much more. You have been far kinder to me than I deserved; but you will never know—my God! you will never know—how much I loved you.'

He tottered rather than walked out of the house, and as he stepped into the sunlight, the fresh breeze touched his cheeks and stirred him. Up on the Heath the trees were green, and overhead the sky was pure and blue; there was a sound of laughter from some children playing in the white dust of the road; and a young woman going past was singing blithely to a baby she carried in her arms.

'The world is a fine world for some

people,' he said; 'but it has always been against me. If I could only begin over again! It would be something now to have a holiday, and be at rest with all people, and to come up here and lie on the Heath, and drink in the sunlight and the fresh air. That is all over now. There is sickness and fire in my blood, and I cannot rest. Brandy—brandy!—I must have brandy, or I shall die before I get home.'

Some copious libations that he drank at a public-house produced the most extraordinary effect upon him. Going directly to his brain, the spirit produced a sort of delirium; and Hickes got on the top of the omnibus in a wild exuberance of mirth. He laughed and sang as the heavy vehicle rumbled into London; he shouted and tossed his hands in the air; and challenged the conductor to drink some more at the next halting-place.

'You've been 'avin' a drop already, sir,' said the man with a laugh; although there were some symptoms of the stranger's hila-

rity which did not at all suggest drunkenness.

When they had got into town, Hickes went to a gunsmith's, and said he wanted a saloon-pistol for rat-shooting.

'I have a rare stock of them,' he said merrily. 'They have bred plentifully this year, and I want to thin the coveys a bit. May I try the range of these pistols?'

'Certainly,' said the gunsmith, taking Hickes into a long chamber behind the shop which was fitted-up for the purpose.

Hickes's manner of handling the weapon was rather dangerous; and once or twice the gunsmith had to put aside the muzzle when it was too directly staring at him.

Hickes fired a number of shots out of various pistols, revolvers included.

'If you fire in that careless fashion,' said the gunsmith good-humouredly, 'you will kill somebody some day.'

'That's precisely what I mean to do,' said Hickes gaily.

'That kind of sport costs too much in this country,' observed the other grimly.

'Tell me now,' said Hickes. 'This saloon-pistol looks rather toyish. Are you sure it would kill the rat?'

'You see,' said the gunmaker, 'that the ball will go through an inch-thick deal board at twenty yards.'

'Is the bone in a man's chest as hard as a deal board?'

'The bone? What bone?'

'Well, the ribs—the plate that covers the chest—whatever it is. Do the ribs go up all the way?'

The gunsmith began to think that his new customer was mad, and hoped he would buy some weapon or other and get out.

At last Hickes chose one of the pistols, and the parcel was made up for him.

'Two pounds you said? and half-a-crown for the box of caps. I find I have here two pounds three shillings and ninepence: would you mind taking the whole sum? It is only a whim of mine.'

The man looked astonished; but Hickes gave him no time to reply. He put the

money on the counter and went out into the open air, saying gaily to himself,

'The last sixpence! the last sixpence! See how I have timed my exit!'

His appearance and the manner of his walking made a good many people turn and look at him. He did not heed them much. He sang snatches of songs—most of them old theatrical favourites, like 'The green bushes,' or 'When a little farm we keep'—and recited bits of plays, waving the little brown paper-parcel in the air. Sometimes he laughed aloud; and a startled passer-by would look with dismay on this pale and haggard wretch, whose ghastly hilarity seemed so strange beside his enfeebled frame and sunken cheeks. At length he reached his lodgings, and went singing upstairs.

As he entered his room, his manner suddenly changed. Arthur Drem was there.

'I don't want to see you just at present,' said Hickes gloomily.

'But I want to see you,' said Arthur Drem, with some show of anger. 'Do you

know that Philip Drem has come back from America, and that he knows all about that money transaction between his father and you? He must have got the story from you. Nobody but yourself would be such an ass as to tell him.'

'I have not seen him for a year,' said Hickes sulkily.

'But you have told some one who knows him. You must have done so. And don't you understand what you have done? By heavens, he will murder you!'

'He won't,' said Hickes.

'You seem not to care; that's because you don't know him. Mind you, there's no bluster about him, as there is about his father. When he sets about a thing, he means business; and if he comes down here to pay you out, he will make it a caution to you.'

'Did you come down to tell me all that?'

'I came down to warn you that he is very likely to find you out; and you may be fool enough to tell him more than he knows. I don't know how much that is;

but there has been a furious scene between his father and him over it. He is out of the house now, for good and all; and I tell you, you had better look out.'

'I think you had better look out,' said Hickes with composure. 'You came to ask me not to tell your share in the matter. Perhaps I will, perhaps I won't.'

'He will throw you out of the window before you have the chance of uttering a word. My advice to you is, to get out of London.'

'I am going.'

'Where?'

'I don't know, nor you either.'

'You are mad—or drunk. You *have* been drinking, I see.'

'I tell you I don't want to hear any more of your insolence!' cried Hickes, in an access of fury. 'I have business to transact. I am pressed for time. I was in capital spirits till I saw you; and I don't want any more of you. Get out!—if you don't, I have got here a pistol for shooting rats, and you'll be the first.'

'None of this nonsense,' said Arthur.

Hickes untied the parcel, took out the pistol, and put a bullet-cap in it. Then he went to the farther end of the room.

'One!' he said.

Arthur moved towards the door, his face white with rage. He did not know how far this madman would go.

'Two!' said Hickes.

Arthur caught hold of the door and opened it.

'Three!' shouted Hickes; and the next moment there was a sharp click—not a report—and Arthur heard the crash of the bullet through the panel of the door, some dozen or so of inches from his face. He darted on to the landing at once, and heard Hickes laughing merrily inside.

Arthur stood for some time irresolutely on the stairs. He was vexed to have received this ignominious expulsion; but at the same time the joke that Hickes had just played was a very awkward one, and he did not much relish the notion of facing this devil-may-care wretch again. He heard

Hickes shutting and locking the door; and then all was silent in the room.

He descended the stairs, and met the landlady.

'Has Mr. Hickes been drinking?' asked Arthur.

'He have been going on awful,' said the frank landlady. 'Pore young man, he seems much distressed, and in consequence has drunk hisself as drunk as ever was, night after night. And in the morning he is 'elpless and crying, and wishes he could kill hisself, and is as ill as ill can be, and worse.'

'I sha'n't disturb him; I will write to him,' said Arthur, who had still a lively recollection of the whistle and crack of the pistol-bullet.

He was just stepping out into the street, when he was confronted by a man who was about to ring the bell. Arthur, looking up, saw before him his cousin Philip, and involuntarily receded a step.

'Don't go away, Arthur,' said Philip; 'I want you. Is Hickes in this house?'

'Yes,' said Arthur, rather timidly. It seemed to him that his cousin had grown graver, sterner, older, since he saw him last; and he noticed that he held in his hand a small wooden case.

'You must go inside with me, to be a witness to an act of justice. You know what Hickes has done—it's only of late that I discovered the real infamy of it. The law does not punish a crime like that; and so—'

'I told him you would kill him!' cried Arthur, beginning to tremble violently. 'I won't go into the house with you; I won't be a party to it. You are going to murder him, and he is so weak he can scarcely stand, and you are strong. It isn't fair—'

'He will have the same chance for his life that I shall have. I shall not lay a finger on him.'

'I know what you mean,' cried Arthur, who was more green than white with fear, 'and I won't be a party to it.'

'I think you will,' said Philip, calmly looking at him. 'I know everything about

the hand you had in that business. I may settle with you afterwards; perhaps I shall never have the chance. But I should advise you to come with me just now, for your own safety.'

The door was still open; Arthur stood aside to let Philip pass.

'No,' said he; 'you go on first, and show me the room.'

Arthur, trembling in every limb, went up the stairs, and paused before Hickes's door. He was speechless with terror; and when Philip bade him enter the room, he clung to the railings as if determined not to budge a foot. Philip went to the door himself, and tried to open it. It was locked. He rapped on the splintered panel; there was no reply. Then he went back a step, lifted his foot, and drove the door in.

The spectacle that then met their eyes made Philip drop the box that was in his hand, while Arthur uttered a cry of horror. On the floor before them lay Hickes, with his mouth open, dead. There was no trace of blood about; but there lay by his side

the saloon-pistol with which he had shot at Arthur. Arthur stood at the door, with a complexion as ghastly as that of the prostrate man, and saw Philip go forward and lift Hickes's arm.

'He is dead,' said Philip.

At length Arthur, still trembling, ventured forward; and the landlady, who had been alarmed by the smashing-in of the door, came running upstairs and entered the room, where she broke into a series of hysterical cries.

'Be quiet, woman!' said Philip. 'We must carry this unhappy wretch to his bed: where is the room?'

She opened a folding-door; and she and Philip — Arthur would not go near the corpse—lifted the body and put it on the bed. Presently Arthur followed, carrying in his hand a paper, which he had picked off the table. He handed it to Philip, who read these words, written in a straggling and tremulous hand:

'This is the last time, Lilian, I shall ever

speak to you. When they show you this paper, you will know that I have tried to make what reparation I could for all that I have done to you. I hope it is not too late. I hope you will get well and strong; I hope you will get the old colour and light back to your face. In a minute or two I shall have set you free; and you will be able to do what you like. Don't think too hardly of me. I have acted badly by you; but I did not know that I was going to be so desperately in love with you—so wretched and broken down. If I have done wrong, I have had my punishment, and this is the end. You don't know what I suffered in wandering about, trying to get a glimpse of you, and never receiving a word or a look from you. Since there is no hope for me, I don't care to live; and, in any case, I am determined to do my best by you now. Good-bye; and don't think I was so bad as I seemed to be. Forgive me for all that I have done—'

The letter was not finished, nor was

there any signature. Philip turned to Arthur, who was looking at the corpse, and said,

'Are you pleased with the result of your work? You ruined this miserable man's life, and you have murdered him. I came to punish him—that duty has been taken out of my hands. But you, who are a greater scoundrel than he ever was, remain unpunished—'

'But you should be satisfied — you should be satisfied,' cried Arthur. 'Isn't this enough? There has been no harm done to you, or to her, that can't be set right now. Why should you want to hurt me? I will do anything you like by way of reparation. What can I do, Philip—what can I do?'

'We will see,' said his cousin.

CHAPTER XIV.

'AFTER LONG GRIEF AND PAIN.'

PHILIP went abroad, wandered about from town to town for about a month. At the expiry of that time he could no longer control his impatience. Finding himself in Paris, he suddenly started one evening by the express-train, and found himself next morning in London. He rested for a few hours at one of the large railway-hotels, and then took the train up to Hampstead.

As he drew near to James Lawson's house, it seemed to him that the blinds on the windows were all drawn down. What was the reason of it? Hastening his steps, he approached the house, and saw with dismay that his eyes had not deceived him.

'Have I come too late?' he groaned aloud. 'Is it all too late now—while I

have been idling abroad, and keeping back from her?'

He went up to the house—the door had inadvertently been left open an inch or so—he entered, and hurriedly walked into the small parlour where the family generally sat. The first thing that he saw was the figure of Lilian bent over the table, her face resting down on her hands. He uttered a cry of joy, and she started up.

'You are not ill!' he cried, taking her hand.

'Hush!' she said, and he saw that her eyes were full of tears.

'What is the matter?' he said, too overjoyed to think of her possible answer. 'I thought you were ill, or dying, my love, my darling; and now I hear you speaking to me—and I know you are mine now—for ever. But, Lilian, what is the matter? Why are you so silent? Are you vexed with me for not coming sooner? Did you think I was not coming?'

'Not that—not that,' she said; and she crept closer to him, and hid her face in his

breast. 'Of course I knew you would come, Philip. But don't you know what has happened—why the blinds are down?'

'Alec?'

'Yes,' she said. 'And the last words he said to me—only this morning—were, "*Why doesn't Philip come to you—why doesn't he come?*" He has been asking for you all during these three days, since ever he knew he would not recover. And I tried to make him believe that you would come; and he was very wretched about it. We sent for you repeatedly—no one had your address. It was for my sake that he was so anxious you should come. I could not convince him.'

'And I was forcing myself to stay away,' said Philip, 'lest you should think me indecorous in my haste to see you. I wish I had come sooner. It was with difficulty that I remained abroad so long. What was his ailment?'

'He died of fever; but he had been very weak and ill of late. Mr. and Mrs. Lawson

are beside themselves with grief: you must not ask to see them now.'

'You look very worn, Lilian, and tired. You have been sitting up all these nights.'

'Sometimes, for a little while,' she said.

'Will you go out now and breathe the fresh air?'

'Ought I?' she said, looking up to him with her simple obedience of old.

'Yes,' he said. 'You can do no more good at present. And you must consider yourself a little—it will be quite a new experience for you.'

'I mean to take very great care of myself now,' she said. And he kissed her, and she left the room.

In a few minutes they left the house together; and Philip turned, according to old habit, towards the East Heath-road.

'Not that way—not that way,' she said, with a slight shudder. 'I wish never to see that road again. You must take me away, Philip, where I shall forget all that time, and what has happened since.'

'What is the time you remember with most pleasure?' he asked.

'Why, you know,' she said.

'Yes, I know,' he said. 'And I shall take you down to Devonshire; and we will live there, if you like, and take up the thread of our past life there, just as if nothing had occurred since. When we go down, you will begin to think it was quite lately you and I walked down by the Dart on that evening—you remember?'

'Have I ever forgotten it? And we shall go down to Paignton—shall we not?—and walk on the sands; and we shall see Brixham, and Berry Head, and the sea; and we shall go again to the old church out on the Point. But I was all wrong, Philip, about bringing away a picture of it. Do you remember, I told you to shut your eyes, and you would carry away a clear memory of it? I have never been able to bring the picture before me; for whenever I thought of the place and of you, I could not see anything for tears.'

'The time of tears is all over,' he said.

'Is it ever over?' she asked, with wistful eyes.

Her brief experience of life had not been a very joyful one.

'You have a great balance of happiness to receive, my darling,' he said. 'You have had all your griefs at the outset of your life. Providence owes you a deep debt of happiness. And the very first thing I shall do, will be to prove you a false prophet out of your own lips. I will carry you off to Tor Bay; and you and I shall see the Dart together once more; and I shall laugh at your prediction.'

'You must never laugh at it, Philip,' she said gravely, 'or at anything that has happened since then. We cannot forget these things; we shall never forget them. Perhaps, if we are to have happiness now, it will be all the sweeter when we think of what is bygone. And O, my darling, the delight of talking to you, and being with you again, is almost more than I can bear!'

So they wandered on, not heeding very much where they went; and their speech,

somehow or other, came back and back again to Tor Bay. In imagination they seemed to hover around the pleasant shores that had once been so beautiful to them; and all their brightest schemes for the future had the sea and the sunlight and the green hills of these Devonshire scenes mixed up with them.

'You will have to grow younger now,' he said. 'You are scarcely twenty; but you look twenty-five. So next year, when you are twenty-one, you must look twenty-four; and when you are twenty-two, you must look twenty-three; and when you are twenty-three, people will think you are twenty-two; until, when you are twenty-five, you will be back again to twenty—and less than twenty; and we shall have you running and laughing and singing, as you did at Torquay. Do you remember when you ran back all the way from Paignton, only because you feared to be late for breakfast?'

'You had no flowers for your table that morning,' she said.

'Only one—a rose,' he answered. 'And until you have grown young again, I think I must give up petting and patronising you. You have lost all your childish ways; you must get them back again before I begin to spoil you. You are too much of a woman now, Lilian—your eyes have been so sad of late.'

'But I am going to take great care of myself now, I told you,' she said. 'I will think of nothing but happy things; and I will get strong—for you would not care for me if I were poor, and haggard, and weak.'

'My darling,' he said, 'if your hair were white, and yourself grown quite old, I would pray to have white hair, and to grow old, for your sake. But it is youth, not age, the next years will bring you. I will take you out into the sunlight, and get back your colour, until you are like a wild rose. Who was the Wild Rose of the Dart in the old times?'

'In the old times!' she said with a sigh. 'I daresay the Dart is as beautiful now as it was then; and has gone on since, not

caring for us or remembering us; and has sung quiet songs in the evening for all sorts of people except us.'

'And now it will sing a song for us—not quiet, but brisk and cheerful, in the morning; and if it doesn't, we will appeal to the sea, and you shall hear the laugh and the splash of the waves all round the coast!'

'But there is no singing like the singing of the Dart,' she said. 'It is so still in the evening, like the stirring wind in the woods.'

Then she said,

'You are not on good terms with your father?'

'No,' he said; 'nor can I ever hope to be. It is only quite recently that I learned a story which I shall never tell you, because it would make you believe that the world was full of devils. But what I discovered then has almost made it impossible that my father and I can ever meet again. When I look at your face, and think of how he and others were implicated in producing

the suffering that is written there, I declare to you that forgiveness seems impossible. It is too much to ask of any man. It is enough charity if I keep my hands off them; and I don't mean to have any settling of old scores with either my father or my cousin. I cannot forgive them. If forgiveness ever becomes possible, it must come from you.'

'If I thought it would please you to be friends with your father,' she said, 'I would go to him to-morrow, and make my intercession.'

'You go to him!' he cried in alarm; 'you must never go to him without my knowledge and presence. Do you understand, Lilian? I will never risk a repetition of all that is bygone.'

'But how are you and he ever to become friends?'

'I am in no hurry.'

'I did not think you so unforgiving.'

'You don't know what you ask,' he said hastily. 'You know nothing of what he and others have done; and I will not tell

you—it would do you no good to know. When I see you getting young and blithe again, I may think differently; but just at present—just at present—when I look at you—'

'Ah, don't talk like that, Philip!' she cried. 'You make me afraid. I have never seen you like that before. They must have done you some terrible wrong.'

'It is you whom they have wronged, and I have kept an account of it; yes, I have kept an account of it. I have put it aside just at present; but I have not drawn my pen across it.'

'But some day,' she said with a smile, 'when I am rummaging among your things, with the curiosity of—of—'

'Why don't you say it?' he said.

'Suppose that I said it,' she said with a blush—'and I come across the book that holds the account, I will take it out into the garden—we shall have a garden, shall we not?—and I will light a small fire of dried leaves and sticks, and put the book on it, and you will see it burn quite away.'

'And we will get somebody to gather up the ashes very carefully, so as not to leave a speck, and carry them down to the sea-shore. No; I wouldn't have the sea polluted with the remains of such a story; we shall have a hole dug for them in the sand, and bury them out of sight.'

'Tell me, now, what are you going to do, Philip,' she said. 'What is your work going to be?'

'To make you strong and cheerful, in the first place,' he said. 'Don't you know that I have a small sum of money that might keep us very well? Only I must have some occupation besides; and we shall settle all that afterwards. When once we get down to Tor Bay, we shall construct schemes by the dozen. And all the time the sea-air will be making your cheeks pink and your eyes bright again.'

'Now let us go back to Mr. and Mrs. Lawson's,' she said with some sudden compunction, for they had almost forgotten the trouble of these poor people in their own joy; and so they returned to the house,

and gave such comfort and assistance as they could. They had been out for something less than an hour; Lilian had grown a year younger in the time, and the difference in her look was apparent to every one.

About three months after that, Philip and she, one calm afternoon, stood by a grave.

'To-morrow we go away,' she said, 'and yet I don't feel as though we were leaving those that are buried here behind us. They follow us, as the moon follows us, wherever we go, and we have only to look up, and we find their faces there. Did I ever tell you, Philip, how vexed I was that poor Alec should die, and not know that you had come back? For I thought he would go to mamma, and tell her that he had left me miserable, and she would be very sad. But now she must know that you came, and Alec must know also, and my father; and they will all be happy to see how happy I am.'

'Are you so very happy already?' he asked.

'I could not be more happy,' she said, as she stood there with her hand on his arm.

Then she said,

'I think, the more friends we have up there, the less we can tell the difference between that world and this. It seems an easy thing to go and join them—except for leaving you, Philip. O, my darling, I hope we shall live together and die together—always together until the end; and then it does not much matter how short or how long life may be.'

That is the cry of many souls, that scarce know whether to hope or fear—that find life a mystery around them, unsettling, uncertain; while the seasons come and go, and the dead are at peace.

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'What is the time you remember with most pleasure?' he asked.

'Why, you know,' she said.

'Yes, I know,' he said. 'And I shall take you down to Devonshire; and we will live there, if you like, and take up the thread of our past life there, just as if nothing had occurred since. When we go down, you will begin to think it was quite lately you and I walked down by the Dart on that evening—you remember?'

'Have I ever forgotten it? And we shall go down to Paignton—shall we not? —and walk on the sands; and we shall see Brixham, and Berry Head, and the sea; and we shall go again to the old church out on the Point. But I was all wrong, Philip, about bringing away a picture of it. Do you remember, I told you to shut your eyes, and you would carry away a clear memory of it? I have never been able to bring the picture before me; for whenever I thought of the place and of you, I could not see anything for tears.'

'The time of tears is all over,' he said.

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